

The Road to Castle Mount

The Science Fiction of Robert Silverberg

Edgar L. Chapman

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The Road to Castle Mount

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The Road to Castle Mount

The Science Fiction of Robert Silverberg

Edgar L. Chapman

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For my mother, Otelia Coburn Chapman,
and my father, Evert L. Chapman,
in gratitude for their continuing love and support.

And to the memory of my great-uncle, Henry D. Siler
(1901–1982), Ph.D., University of Texas, 1949,
a decorated veteran of the Pacific war,
who taught me the value of reading science fiction.

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Preface

This study began many years ago for another publisher, encouraged by a friendly editor named Tom Staicar. Unfortunately, a senior editor at that company, hoping to impress the new owners who had purchased it, terminated the series for which the study was to be an entry.

Several editors at Greenwood have given encouragement and assistance during the long writing and revising of this work: Marshall Tymn recommended the work, and Marilyn Brownstein, Nina Pearlstein, Emma Moore, and George Butler gave encouragement at various times and showed patience about the time I was taking to finish it.

Help has also been provided by many other people. Robert Silverberg himself was kind enough to provide information in letters and to answer some questions about his work at a conference of the International Association for the Fantastic on the Arts.

Any scholar who studies Silverberg must also feel an enormous debt to the extraordinary bibliographical work of the late Thomas Clareson and to his pioneering Starmont study of Silverberg's fiction. While one may differ with many of Dr. Clareson's interpretations and judgments as a critic of fiction (as I do on occasion), his trailblazing efforts still offer useful perspectives.

The staffs of Illinois State University's Milner Library and Bradley's Cullom-Davis Library (especially Barb Tunks and Marina Savole) have been helpful at many times down through the years. Brian Simpson of Babbitt's Used Books has been of assistance in helping to find out-of-print science fiction.

Encouragement and support were also provided by administrators at Bradley University, Peoria, Illinois, especially the late Max Kele as dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and Claire Etaugh, my current and understanding dean. My current chairperson, Dr. Margaret Carter, has been an understanding supporter for many years. My colleague, Warren F. Dwyer, has read two chapters of the manuscript and made helpful criticism. My literature students at Bradley University, especially those in my science fiction courses over a couple of decades, have also been a stimulating influence on my thinking about Silverberg.

Our fine word-processor operator, Willie Heberer, has done an extraordinary job over the years of reading my rough drafts and transforming them into readable manuscripts.

A major debt is also owed to my teachers at all levels. Only a few of the outstanding ones who have influenced my reading and writing can be mentioned here. Mary Vance encouraged my reading and writing in my high school days in Bloomfield, Missouri. Several undergraduate instructors stimulated my understanding of literature and writing, especially John Randolph of Westminster College, Fulton, Missouri, and James Carver and Georgia Bowman of William Jewell College, Liberty, Missouri.

I was also fortunate to have some splendid role models during my study at Brown University, including George Anderson, Leicester Bradner, Millicent Bell, and R. W. Kenny, who taught me much about classic English literature. I. J. Kapstein, Elmer Blistein, and A. J. Sabol provided splendid comments about scholarly writing on literature. I owe a special debt to S. Foster Damon's stimulating views on allegory and symbolism. Even greater is my debt to the brilliant Hyatt H. Waggoner, a renowned figure in the study of American literature, for insight into the interpretation of literature.

Finally, I have received encouragement from family members during the work on this book. My brother, Richard Chapman, a historian at Francis Marion University, and my sons, Benjamin and Terrence (fine liberal arts students), often supplied insights through their assessments of science fiction novels and films. However, the greatest of these debts are cited in the dedication.

Key to Abbreviations



WORKS BY SILVERBERG

AABY	<i>Across a Billion Years</i>
AWE	<i>At Winter's End</i>
AY	<i>The Alien Years</i>
BOS	<i>The Book of Skulls</i>
BTSZ	<i>Beyond the Safe Zone</i>
BWTD	<i>Born with the Dead and Other Stories</i>
CFDMLD	<i>Conquerors from the Darkness with Master of Life and Death</i>
CG	<i>Capricorn Games</i>
DI	<i>Dying Inside</i>
DL	<i>The Dawning Light</i>
DT	<i>Dimension Thirteen</i>
DTTE	<i>Downward to the Earth</i>
FOSD	<i>The Feast of St. Dionysus</i>
FOTW	<i>The Face of the Waters</i>
GD	<i>Galactic Dreamers: Science Fiction as Visionary Literature</i>
GOW	<i>The Gate of Worlds</i>
GTK	<i>Gilgamesh the King</i>
HSAM	<i>Hot Sky at Midnight</i>
IAC	<i>In Another Country</i>
LCVC	<i>Lost Cities and Vanished Civilizations</i>

LFA	<i>Letters From Atlantis</i>
LOD	<i>Lord of Darkness</i>
LVC	<i>Lord Valentine's Castle</i>
MAS	<i>Moonferns and Starsongs</i>
MC	<i>Majipoor Chronicles</i>
MITM	<i>The Man in the Maze</i>
MOLAD	<i>Master of Life and Death</i>
MOT	<i>The Masks of Time</i>
MS	<i>The Mutant Season</i>
NSTS	<i>Next Stop the Stars</i>
ROAC	<i>Revolt on Alpha C</i>
RR	<i>Reflections and Refractions: Thoughts on Science-Fiction and Other Matters</i>
RTL	<i>Recalled to Life</i>
SBTC	"Sounding Brass, Tinkling Cymbal"
SE	<i>The Seed of Earth</i>
SITF	<i>Shadrach in the Furnace</i>
SM	<i>Son of Man</i>
SOM	<i>Sorcerers of Majipoor</i>
SP	<i>The Shrouded Planet</i>
SS	<i>Secret Sharers: The Collected Stories of Robert Silverberg</i> , Vol. 1.
TBORS	<i>The Best of Robert Silverberg</i> , Vol. 1.
TCCP	<i>The Conglomeroid Cocktail Party</i>
TGD	<i>The Golden Dream: Seekers of El Dorado</i>
TOC	<i>A Time of Changes</i>
TOG	<i>Tower of Glass</i>
TOTS	<i>To Open the Sky</i>
TTLL	<i>To the Land of the Living</i>
UT	<i>Unfamiliar Territory</i>
WF1992	<i>World's Fair, 1992</i>
WTC	<i>World of a Thousand Colors</i>
WW	<i>Robert Silverberg's Worlds of Wonder</i>

KEY TO OTHER WORKS

AOC	<i>Anatomy of Criticism</i> by Northrop Frye
BSF	<i>Bridges to Science Fiction</i> edited by George W. Slusser, George Guffey, and Mark Rose

CTN	<i>Conrad the Novelist</i> by Albert J. Guerard, Jr.
DM	<i>Dream Makers</i> edited by Charles Platt
DOS	<i>A Dictionary of Symbols</i> by J. E. Cirlot
DOSIMO	<i>The Dreams Our Stuff Is Made Of</i> by Thomas Disch
EOF	<i>The Encyclopedia of Fantasy</i> by John Clute and John J. Grant
EOSF	<i>Encyclopedia of Science Fiction</i> by John Clute and John J. Grant
FASF	<i>Fantasy and Science Fiction</i>
HV	<i>Hitler Victorious</i> edited by Gregory Benford and Martin H. Greenberg
IA	<i>Isaac Asimov: The Foundations of Science Fiction</i> by James Gunn
IASF	<i>Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction</i>
MLPJF	<i>The Magic Labyrinth of Philip José Farmer</i> by Edgar L. Chapman
MOSF	<i>Masters of Science Fiction</i> by Brian Stableford
NYROSF	<i>The New York Review of Science Fiction</i>
PFA	<i>Phoenix from the Ashes</i> edited by Carl B. Yoke
RH	<i>Robert Heinlein: America as Science Fiction</i> by H. Bruce Franklin
RS	<i>Robert Silverberg</i> by Thomas Clareson
RSMT	<i>Robert Silverberg's Many Trapdoors</i> edited by Charles Elkins and Martin H. Greenberg
RSPSB	<i>Robert Silverberg: A Primary and Secondary Bibliography</i> by Thomas Clareson
RTSF	<i>The Road to Science Fiction</i> edited by James Gunn
SFFA1990	<i>Science Fiction and Fantasy Annual 1990</i>
SFTE	<i>Science Fiction: Ten Explorations</i> by Colin Manlove
SOF	<i>Strategies of Fantasy</i> by Brian Attebery
SS	<i>The Secular Scripture</i> by Northrop Frye
TCWK	<i>The Company We Keep</i> by Wayne C. Booth
TKTU	<i>The Known and the Unknown</i> by Gary Wolfe
TYS	<i>Trillion Year Spree</i> by Brian Aldiss with David Wingrove
WBTH	<i>The World beyond the Hill</i> by Alexei and Cory Panshin
WOSF	"The Worldview of Science Fiction" by James Gunn

1

Silverberg: The Man and His Work

One of the most prolific, honored, and widely read living science fiction writers, Robert Silverberg has forged a professional career that began in the 1950s and has flourished in succeeding decades. His achievements have brought him recognition and awards not only from critics and reviewers but also from fellow writers and a wide, if varying, group of readers. After first gaining fame for his magazine fiction of the fifties, Silverberg remade his career in the late sixties, assimilating the ideals and methods of the “new wave” literary science fiction of the time, and producing a number of well-crafted novels containing literary symbolism and dramatic irony. However, the conflict between his visionary and his ironic selves was seldom completely integrated during that era, and disillusionment with his audience produced a hiatus in the seventies. Yet, after a period of silence, Silverberg returned to an active role as a fiction writer. Nevertheless, despite the appeal of his novels to discerning readers, Silverberg’s achievement still eludes easy assessment.

From the very beginning, Silverberg was perceived as a promising and potentially brilliant author in the genre, and he has persisted long enough to have won more Hugo Awards (based on the vote of non-professionals) and Nebula Awards (selected by a smaller and probably more discerning group of editors, critics, and writers) than any other author. Indeed, the general esteem shown for Silverberg’s best work has often been summed up by the comment of Gerald Jonas, a reviewer for the *New York Times* who once compared Silverberg’s mature work favorably to that of John Updike

in the world of "mainstream" or "realistic" fiction.¹ Moreover, Silverberg's career, like Updike's, is far from over.

Such praise has been somewhat double-edged and ambiguous. The comparison to Updike illustrates the reservations felt about Silverberg's work, for both Silverberg and Updike have been accused of displaying more technical facility than substance.² Indeed, while Silverberg's work has received its share of critical analysis from academic scholars, the author's literary position remains controversial, like the genre in which he writes. Though Silverberg's early sins as an ambitious neophyte and author of formula adventures have been largely forgiven by his critics, later divergences and shifts in direction are frequently used to indict his career.

Some critics, including a former science fiction author who has sought a higher status while condemning the genre in prestigious forums, such as an article in *Atlantic*, cannot forgive Silverberg for writing *Lord Valentine's Castle*, a charming adventure fantasy, the major fault of which seems to be its commercial success.³ Yet Silverberg did not follow *Lord Valentine's Castle* with a series of pot-boiler fantasies; on the contrary, he has explored significant areas of experience in a number of impressive novels. Those who read science fiction and fantasy with serious interest can scarcely deny the impact of his presence.

Given Silverberg's achievements, it would seem that his best work should give him a literary rank similar to that of Brian Aldiss, Ursula LeGuin, and Gene Wolfe, to mention living contemporary authors who enjoy superior reputations within the genres of science fiction and fantasy, as well as solid reputations among critics of mainstream fiction.⁴ At any rate, Silverberg's importance as writer and editor should be beyond question. Whatever a writer's failures, he or she deserves to be judged by his or her best work, not by false starts or hasty apprentice work. Moreover, Silverberg's fiction should rank highly when judged against some of the best known figures in the genre. Even a casual reader of some discernment can perceive that Silverberg's mature work is generally more sophisticated than Robert Heinlein's, richer and more ironic than Isaac Asimov's, and less mannered than Ray Bradbury's. Nor is it dwarfed by comparison with current masters, including Aldiss, Wolfe, LeGuin, and John Crowley.

However, since Silverberg's career began in the fifties, we may find it helpful to measure his performance against that of the generation of writers who broke in during that era: notably Philip K. Dick, Philip José Farmer, Harlan Ellison, and Frederik Pohl, among others. Though serious assessment of these figures has just begun, Silverberg does not fare badly from this point of view. Like Silverberg, these authors have produced memorable work, despite a good deal of hasty and second-rate writing; and one of them, Dick, enjoys a high reputation, transcending mere critical respect, and approaching the veneration of a cult. Each, on occasion, made questionable career decisions, and, like most professional authors, each has felt obliged

to compromise or exploit the market for commercial reasons.⁵ As all but the naive know, those who write for a popular market can seldom afford to ignore its demands.

Like others of the fifties generation, Silverberg's career has created its share of misunderstandings and myths, one cause being Silverberg's own public comments in prefaces, interviews, and autobiographical memoirs such as his well known essay in Aldiss's and Harry Harrison's *Hell's Cartographers* (1975). Any author who produces successfully over a lengthy period may feel the need to re-imagine and re-shape his career, and Silverberg has experienced this desire more than once. Perhaps because he began publishing regularly at so early an age, he has re-invented his career not merely once, but at three pivotal times: in the early sixties, as a result of the frustration created by his initial ambitious assault on magazines and paperback publishers; in the period of 1969-74, when he established himself as a "new wave" author of literary science fiction; and yet again during his sabbatical from the genre in the seventies, before he entered his current phase as a distinguished novelist and master of short fiction.

Much of the debate aroused by Silverberg's work and career has resulted from his well publicized changes of direction. At first considered a promising newcomer, he graduated, after hard work, to the status of a talented writer who had supposedly wasted his gifts in frenetic hack-work (Malzberg 1974, 69). Indeed, Silverberg himself tended to accept this estimate (SBTC 33-37) until, in the late sixties and early seventies, he produced, by dint of arduous labor, including painstaking revisions, a great deal of "new wave" science fiction—or science fiction displaying the techniques of literary modernism (SBTC 37-38). Thus he became one of the prize exhibits, demonstrating that this disparaged genre was capable of presenting the world with fiction of high literary quality: a literary excellence, defined as fiction but evincing the techniques and modernist irony found in the poetry of T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, and W. B. Yeats, and the symbolist fiction of Franz Kafka, Joseph Conrad, and James Joyce.⁶

Accolades and awards followed rapidly, hailing the "new Silverberg," and his early years were now seen as a valuable apprenticeship in which he learned the tricks of his craft, although literary politics and intellectual fashions clearly influenced some of the plaudits. Despite the high quality of much of Silverberg's work, it was also important for editors and reviewers to demonstrate that science fiction was capable of producing writing comparable to the more traditional literature enshrined in the literary canons of the academic world. It was also important to show that science fiction authors could respond to the social conflicts between mainstream America and the counterculture. Both innovative literary techniques and enlightened social concerns appeared in Silverberg's fiction and influenced the largely favorable response to it.

However, from a later perspective, Silverberg's work of this era appears somewhat uneven. While some of Silverberg's novels of the period, such as *Shadrach in the Furnace* (1976), were probably underrated or ignored, and others, such as *Dying Inside* (1972), hold up well on later readings, the 1971 Nebula Award for *A Time of Changes* must now strike many as the judges' bow to the romanticism about hallucinatory drugs in the era of Woodstock (1969) and the Age of Aquarius.

Yet when Silverberg, now established as a star of the genre, withdrew from active writing in the middle seventies, voicing disenchantment with the reading audience, he surprised many by returning with a romantic fantasy. Though he seemed to have abandoned his ironic fiction, this impression was quickly corrected by other work. Silverberg's work began to stimulate negative and lukewarm responses. Perhaps it would have helped if Silverberg had not spent time in his sabbatical from fiction writing condemning (in numerous essays and interviews) those readers who had failed to appreciate his more literary work. Although this is usually a futile enterprise for an author, Silverberg's acerbic comments had seemed to confirm his status as a mature science fiction writer who had become too highbrow for the market.⁷

At any rate, when Silverberg began to publish fiction again, at the end of the decade, some of the same readers who had admired *Nightwings* (1969), *Dying Inside* (1972), and "Born with the Dead" (1974) seemed disconcerted and baffled by his first major effort, *Lord Valentine's Castle* (1980). Nor were matters improved when this romantic fantasy was followed by other novels that seemed to veer away from the ironic vision of the "new Silverberg" to offer large-scale epic conflicts. There were also two ambitious forays into historical fiction, though Silverberg later expressed regret for these ventures (mainly on commercial grounds).⁸

Ironically enough, Silverberg's later fiction has received many positive reviews, and it has also been the recipient of awards. Clearly, the later Silverberg has been misunderstood and, except for discerning critics, judged too hastily. When we look into Silverberg's early work, we find evidence of a strongly romantic strain in his imagination. In the latest phase of his career, moreover, he has spoken of the successful writer as a juggler, a metaphor that he employed skillfully in *Lord Valentine's Castle*.⁹ On other occasions, he has modestly spoken of himself as an "old pro," rather than making exaggerated claims for his role as an artist, as the rhetoric of modernist writers was inclined to do.¹⁰ He has continued to publish at least a novel a year, as well as short fiction, and he also does editorial work.

The emphasis on professionalism in this stage of his career has produced predictable revaluations. While some readers and critics were murmuring that Silverberg had abandoned literary values to return to commercial work, others offered highly qualified defenses. No doubt some concluded that Silverberg, whose darker vision had found expression in *Dying Inside* and

other works of the early seventies, had been overrated, in contrast with new luminaries of the genre, such as Wolfe and LeGuin. Even so consistent a supporter of Silverberg's work as the late Thomas Clareson—a scholar to whom all serious students of Silverberg are deeply indebted—was guarded in his comments about Silverberg's work in the eighties and nineties. While some of Silverberg's more recent fiction, especially a few shorter works, display, in Clareson's opinion, a high quality of conception and execution, his considered view was that Silverberg's "stories and novels" of the current period were dominated by "spectacle and thus present the reader with brilliant surfaces" (RSMT 11).

Others have raised questions regarding the consistency of Silverberg's intellectual vision. An example of such a probing study appears in an essay by Robert Killheffer in the *New York Review of Science Fiction* (1989). Seeing a conflict between the Silverberg of *Dying Inside* and the Silverberg of the later historical novel, *Lord of Darkness* (1983), Killheffer found uncertainties in the direction of Silverberg's work (although he was astute enough to acknowledge the strengths of *Lord of Darkness*).¹¹ However, we may wonder in passing why the darkly ironic vision of *Dying Inside* should seem so different from the grim fictional world of *Lord of Darkness*. Indeed, the critic who sees a conflict between these two novels might have been misled by surface contrasts: the exotic savagery of the Africa of Elizabethan times may differ more in degree than in kind from Silverberg's contemporary realism that describes the urban jungle of New York City in the sixties.

Surely the major flaw in Killheffer's approach to Silverberg (and some other well intentioned essays) is the error of isolating two novels from different periods of the author's career and using them to develop a thesis to demonstrate the author's inconsistency or uncertainty of direction. If we want to play this kind of game, we might, in fact, examine *Son of Man* (1971), a work of romantic speculation, and *Dying Inside* (1972), an exercise of modernist irony—two works from virtually the same period in Silverberg's career that lend themselves to an even greater contrast than Killheffer finds in *Dying Inside* and *Lord of Darkness*. However, we will take a more sensible approach to understanding the achievement of so productive and complex an author as Silverberg. We will look at his career as a whole and all its internal consistency, despite the author's occasional self-contradictory statements.

Indeed, so acute a critic as Russell Letson has called attention to some of the unifying themes and concerns of Silverberg's work (RSMT 15–38). As Letson notes, the apparent contradictions of Silverberg's experiments with popular forms (romantic fantasy, historical fiction, etc.) in later novels are less significant than "evidence of continuity of content and attitudes in his postretirement work" (RSMT 36). Letson wisely sees the recurrence of earlier themes in recent fiction, much as Clareson had earlier noted in his Star-mont Press monograph on Silverberg (1983) that some themes of the

mature novels of 1968–74 had already been embodied in the shorter fiction of Silverberg's early years (RS 30–44).

In order to gain a useful overview of Silverberg's career and the sharp turns and reversals on the road to producing his massive canon, we shall now turn to a brief sketch of Silverberg's life and the successive phases of his career, from tentative beginnings to formidable production and assured craftsmanship.

Although Silverberg continues to write and publish energetically, we can discern four logically distinct divisions in his career. These may be described, using traditional terms, as an apprenticeship period, a journeyman period, a climactic period of mastery, and a second period of mature work, following a hiatus in the seventies.¹² These periods may be defined even more clearly in a brief sketch of Silverberg's life, which has been remarkably single-minded in its devotion to authorship.

Despite Silverberg's habit of publishing much about his writing and his life, a biographical sketch is likely to seem thin, unless we see his life as essentially embodied in the literary career. Nevertheless, a rapid overview of the stages of his career is in order. Silverberg was born in New York City in 1935 to parents of Jewish descent, Michael and Helen (Baim) Silverberg. His life was undoubtedly shaped by the fact that he was an only child who early established a reputation as a prodigious learner. In Silverberg's early development, there are obvious similarities to the biographies of other precocious young authors, including many in science fiction legend such as Isaac Asimov, Stanley Weinbaum, Poul Anderson, and Samuel R. Delaney.

According to the biographical sketch he has provided in *Worlds of Wonder* (1987), his voracious reading stimulated a desire to write before he was ten (WW 1–3). His reading led him from such children's fantasies as Lewis Carroll and J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* to the discovery of science fiction around the age of twelve. Encounters with the nostalgic tone of H. P. Lovecraft's fantasy (which imitates a similar tone in Lord Dunsany's tales) nourished his sense of the romance of lost worlds and vanished peoples. Similarly, Silverberg's encounter with Olaf Stapledon's *Odd John* introduced him to a tragic tale of a youthful genius "with whom, nevertheless, I was easily able to identify" (WW 4). Clearly, a writer's early reading may create a striking resonance in his work. In these influences, for instance, we can easily identify the first appearance of motifs that would be blended in *At Winter's End* (1988).

In adolescence Silverberg began to write fiction obsessively, and he continued these efforts while progressing through the next stage of a budding science fiction writer, a period as an energetic fan. Although he dismisses these stories as puerile, some were circulated in mimeographed fan magazines, and his developing critical sense found expressions in reviews for these non-professional journals. By the time Silverberg entered Columbia in the

fifties, he had become an ambitious amateur writer, nourished by the romanticism of classic fantasy and magazine science fiction, and determined to embark on a professional career.

Unfortunately, in his opinion, he may have been impeded by some of his reading, especially by Thomas Uzzell's *Narrative Technique*, a forgotten book on the craft of writing commercial fiction. Silverberg believes, with some reason, that Uzzell's strictures on technique were intimidating to a young author, and probably inhibited the development of his imagination (WW 8–10). More helpful may have been the literature curriculum at Columbia, which introduced him to the ironic masterpieces of modernist literature, and thereby provided a counterbalance to his youthful romanticism. Especially significant, in Silverberg's mature retrospective view, was his reading of H.D.F. Kitto's *Greek Tragedy* (1939), which provided a realistic and tragic vision of the harsh realities of experience (WW 26–30). Silverberg also credits science fiction's two best critics of the John W. Campbell era (1939–65), James Blish and Damon Knight, with helping to shape his judgment (WW 18–26). Remarkably, he managed to achieve the publication of his first novel, *Revolt on Alpha C* (1955), a juvenile that was the product of arduous rewriting. Graduation and his marriage to Barbara Brown in 1956 spurred his ambitions. However, early successes created the perils of overconfidence. Though Silverberg received a Hugo Award as "Best New Writer" in 1956, the necessity of making a living impelled him to write hastily and to rely on conventional science fiction plots and themes. Though his early work shows occasional flashes of originality and he frequently brings a fresh intellectual twist to cliché situations, his early fiction is frequently dominated by cleverness and commercialism. Indeed Silverberg's obvious facility with words now enabled him to publish fiction that must be described as predictable hack-work.

Thus in the later two-thirds of the fifties Silverberg's energies were devoted to the prolific production and marketing of magazine science fiction of all lengths from the short story to the novel (RS 10–11). Numerous hastily written novels appeared as paperback originals after magazine serialization, although Silverberg also published an occasional hardcover novel, starting with his first novel for a juvenile market (RS 14–22). This frenetic period (1953–59) may be seen as a stressful apprenticeship. His aims were confused, and he often squandered his energies; fortunately his imagination survived, and he learned his trade.

In a second period (1960–67), Silverberg learned to rely less on magazine science fiction, and turned to a variety of writing projects, including a season in purgatory as an anonymous pornographer (RS 24). He discovered a successful role in writing non-fiction for general readers, mainly popularizations of science and archaeology (SBTC 26–27). Thus, while earning steady income (and a second education) from writing a series of readable non-fiction historical and scientific books, ranging from *Lost Cities and Vanished*

Civilizations (1962) to an ambitious narrative of the search for El Dorado, Silverberg was able to conserve his imaginative resources for more careful writing. During this phase of his career, Silverberg re-assessed his role in the science fiction world, and began to reveal talents as an editor. As a result, Silverberg refined his craftsmanship with various stories and novels, especially those for Frederik Pohl's *Galaxy*, which were combined to make an episodic novel, *To Open the Sky*. Silverberg's growth in this period culminated in the ambitious departures of *Thorns* (written in a burst of energy in 1966) and *The Man in the Maze*, completed in 1967, along with some other major projects (SBTC 31–34).

This period of thoughtful labor can be called the journeyman stage of Silverberg's development, when the author began to understand better both the demands and limitations of his profession, and the possibilities of his own future. As with many writers, it led to a third phase (roughly 1969–74), which established Silverberg as a major novelist in the world of serious science fiction, and as a pioneering leader for the genre in intellectual speculation and innovative narrative technique. During this initial mature phase, Silverberg demonstrated a virtuoso mastery of fictional techniques and intellectual themes while avoiding the stylistic clichés and commercialism of his youthful early fiction. A rapid series of impressive novels appeared in this period, including *Nightwings*, *Tower of Glass*, *Dying Inside*, *Downward to the Earth*, and *The Book of Skulls*, as well as exercises in more romantic speculation, such as the ambitious failure, *Son of Man*. Although several of Silverberg's books were nominated for awards, it was, ironically, one of the weakest of his novels, *A Time of Changes*, that was honored with the Nebula. However, *Dying Inside* was the beneficiary of a special John W. Campbell Award, and it remains one of Silverberg's most respected works, despite a rather silly debate about whether it was authentic science fiction (RS 66).

Another irony was that Silverberg's imaginative development in the novel form tended to overshadow his remarkable achievement in post-modernist or experimental short fiction during this period, especially in the collection entitled *Unfamiliar Territory* (1973). However, the novelettes collected in the volume *Born with the Dead and Other Stories* received some justified recognition, with the title story winning another Nebula.

In general, Silverberg in this phase combined the fictional techniques of literary modernism with the sophisticated social criticism of the "new wave" writers of the sixties. Many reviews and a new generation of critics who were attracted to science fiction began to speak of the "new Silverberg" and to group his work with that of other American writers of the "new wave," such as Silverberg's friends Harlan Ellison and Barry Malzberg. The American "new wave" is fairly represented by Ellison's *Dangerous Visions* anthology (1967), to which Silverberg contributed the memorable "Flies." These American writers were, in part, responding to initiatives of British science fiction writers, who were attacking taboos and offering defiant social

criticism.¹³ Many of the American “new wave” writers were established professionals like Silverberg who welcomed the chance to break through the restrictions of commercialism.

It is important to note, however, that Silverberg’s work contained more variety than the phrase “new wave” might suggest. In addition to the ironic realism of such novels as *Dying Inside* and *The Book of Skulls*, Silverberg produced novels of religious speculation and quest such as *Son of Man*, *Downward to the Earth*, and *Nightwings*. Several of the novels, including *Tower of Glass*, *The Stochastic Man*, and *Shadrach in the Furnace*, emphasized social criticism and comment on the efforts of political action to achieve a more satisfactory and human civilization.

Indeed, the third phase might be called Silverberg’s first period of mastery. Silverberg’s success as an author of literary stature came at a considerable cost. Once again, an intense effort resulted in a depletion of the author’s imaginative energy. So this period ended abruptly when a weary and overworked Silverberg decided to take a leave of absence from writing (1974–78).

Although this was actually Silverberg’s second major extended leave from science fiction, it was much more publicized than the first (1960–62) had been, partly because of the stature he had achieved, and partly because of his extensive and frequently sarcastic comments on the genre. His public statements expressed a deep and well-nurtured dissatisfaction with science fiction’s more provincial readers, who often seemed to be mired in the optimism of the Campbell era, with its romantic views of technology and an Americanized federation in space.¹⁴ During this sabbatical, he wrote many retrospective prefaces to new editions of his fiction, as well as his widely noted essay “Sounding Brass, Tinkling Cymbal,” in *Hell’s Cartographers* (1975). Some of his statements seemed to imply that he might abandon the genre entirely; at any rate, he joined Ellison and Malzberg in excoriating the less sophisticated fans of science fiction.¹⁵

Moreover, there had been changes in his life. Because of a fire that had destroyed his house in New York City, Silverberg and his wife had moved and they eventually took the drastic step of leaving New York for Oakland. Commenting about this devastation of his personal world, Silverberg wrote that the fire had made him aware of “the real anguish of life” (SBTC 37). Although the kinder West Coast environment proved to have a healing effect and encouraged Silverberg to take up gardening, he and his first wife were separated in 1975. In 1978, he began a re-entry into the arduous world of professional fiction by obtaining a large advance from a publisher as a result of a proposal for his epic novel, *Lord Valentine’s Castle* (1980).

The commercial success of this novel assured Silverberg of a triumphant return to the world of science fiction, but the romantic nature of the story surprised critics and readers. Although many reviewers were favorable, Sil-

verberg's publication of a lengthy science fantasy has prompted negative comment about surrender to commercialism and a betrayal of the literary standards attained in his celebrated work of the early seventies (RSMT 35). Perhaps such responses were inevitable, but Silverberg had made them easier by invoking high literary ideals in his attacks on the allegedly mindless and provincial fans who had embraced his best work, such as *Nightwings*. Nor were Silverberg's beginnings as a prolific adventure story writer forgotten.

In reality, *Lord Valentine's Castle* was not a reversion to childish melodrama, but rather it was a skillful and sophisticated novel. It was not a fantasy in the Tolkien tradition, but a "science fantasy," to borrow a term that Brian Attebery has invented to describe various works by Gene Wolfe, Suzette Haden Elgin, John Crowley, and others (SOF 105-125). Moreover, as Russell Letson has shrewdly observed, despite the romantic aura of Silverberg's Majipoor, *Lord Valentine's Castle* is reminiscent of the cleverly ironic fantasies of Jack Vance (RSMT 36).

Whatever fellow authors and critics might say, Majipoor was a sufficiently solid creation to serve as the setting of three other volumes, and its imaginative appeal has been exploited in a spinoff series where other authors invent adventures in imaginary realms. While Silverberg was continuing the saga of Majipoor, however, he was also writing a large body of ironic short stories and making a foray into the realm of the historical novel, with two ambitious books, *Lord of Darkness* and *Gilgamesh the King*. Although Silverberg was later to express public regret over his ventures into historical fiction, these novels may have also created the impression that Silverberg was planning another departure from the genre.

However, with the publication of *Tom O'Bedlam* in 1985, Silverberg returned more emphatically to the world of science fiction, publishing at least a hardcover novel annually thereafter, as well as numerous short stories and edited collections. Moreover, his personal life entered a new phase with his divorce in 1986 and marriage to the young and promising science fiction writer Karen Haber in 1987.

It is clear that Silverberg's career is now in a fourth phase: a mature period of obvious mastery of craft, coupled with a persistent and probing desire to explore the human condition. Although his most respected novel from this period is very likely *At Winter's End*, Silverberg's impressive saga of a civilization re-discovering its past, he has produced a number of memorable novels in recent years, including *The Face of the Waters*, *Kingdoms of the Wall*, *Hot Sky at Midnight*, and three novels developed from short stories by the late Isaac Asimov.

Since Silverberg has indicated a major influence in *Lord of Darkness*, it is tempting to speak of this fourth phase of his career as the emergence of a "Conradian" novelist.¹⁶ However, we may find it useful to regard Silverberg's current period as one when he further refines his role as a maker of sophisticated fables, like a prolific twentieth-century Hawthorne, or a mod-

ernist novelist sharing affinities of vision with Joseph Conrad, E. M. Forster, and the James Joyce of *Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Certainly Silverberg's indebtedness to earlier literary modernists, such as Conrad, Joyce, T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats, and Franz Kafka, is obvious in much of his recent fiction.

On the other hand, Silverberg has been a seemingly tireless explorer in the various phases of his career. Although he now likes to call himself, somewhat casually, an "old pro" in his current phase, he is certainly not beyond the point of further self-transformation. Though the current literary era is being designated a "post-modern" era, its shape is still in the process of definition. It is tempting to believe that Silverberg, who has demonstrated virtuosity and the ability to re-invent his career on several occasions, may help to define the post-modern era, at least as far as serious science fiction is concerned.

In retrospect, we can see that Silverberg's life as a science fiction author has been dominated by apparently opposing aims: a desire for literary recognition and fame, and an equally strong desire for commercial success, whether in science fiction or in mainstream writing. Beyond this obvious conflict, Silverberg's imaginative work has also been depicted between romantic aspirations and a gradually maturing ironic awareness of human limitation. Like many precocious fans of science fiction, Silverberg was attracted to the genre partly because of its combination of romantic idealism and highly rational technology, which seemed to promise a fulfillment of humanity's dreams. Moreover, like those fans who graduated into authorship early, much of the published work of the early Silverberg was highly romantic. Like many young science fiction authors who have advanced into mature years, Silverberg's imagination has become more disciplined and ironic as his understanding of the human condition has deepened.

In this respect, the comparisons with Nathaniel Hawthorne and Conrad contain a deeper validity. Both Hawthorne and Conrad were attracted to the romantic idealism and iconography of their times, and both were drawn to romantic causes in their youths: Hawthorne was a dreamy recluse, appearing to others much like the student protagonist of his early novel, *Fanshawe*, and attracted to the movements around him, although he also perceived their tragic limitations; the young Conrad, aspiring like Lord Jim to be a man of action, was also drawn to dubious romantic enterprises, which the mature writer treated as quixotic. Both learned to be wary of the perils of seductive dreams and to see experience from a more mature perspective.

It is also clear that the same maturing process has taken place in the work of Robert Silverberg. Unlike many writers, however, Silverberg has placed the record of his apprenticeship and his journeyman years, and his frustrations and changes of course, on a public display. Much of his early fiction

was published in magazines and books, and remains fairly accessible. His prefaces to the essays he has provided about his goals and attitudes at various times in his career are deceptively candid in tone. Clearly, in the pursuit of his mature identity as a writer, Silverberg has felt the need to re-invent his career more than once. Yet a study of his work as a whole shows that it has developed as a result of a consistent inner urgency. It is, in essence, the embodiment of a maturing vision of human aspiration and tragic human limitations.

2

The Early Silverberg: An Apprentice Professional, 1954–1960

When Silverberg made his first assault on the world of science fiction in the middle 1950s, the genre was still in the late phase of the so-called Golden Age, inaugurated by John W. Campbell as an influential editor; but science fiction was also a minority genre, a “ghetto” (according to some writers) that reached only a limited audience through pulp magazines. Leaders in the fifties included Horace Gold’s *Galaxy* and *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, edited at first by J. Francis McComas and Anthony Boucher and later given its identity by Edward Ferman. These magazines challenged the position of Campbell’s *Astounding*.¹ Lesser magazines also continued to publish vigorously, such as *Science Fiction Adventures*, *Infinity*, and *Amazing*, many of them carrying on the tradition of adventurous science fiction.

However, hardcover book publication for science fiction in the early and middle fifties was relatively rare (being mainly the province of certain small houses), except for a growing juvenile or young adult market. Robert Heinlein and Isaac Asimov published some of their best work for this audience. A new commercial force was the paperback houses, which were moving beyond reprints of hardcover fiction to publish original novels. In science fiction, two of the major houses were Ballantine, which boldly offered the public original novels by leading authors, such as Arthur C. Clarke and Theodore Sturgeon, and Ace, which specialized in slightly cheaper editions of novels that were marketed as “space opera” or adventure science fiction. Obviously, the audience for paperback originals overlapped the magazine audience, but it was not identical to it.

At any rate, Silverberg made assaults on all these markets in his apprentice years of 1955–60, having considerable success except for his failure to break into the prestigious Ballantine line, which he would not reach until the middle sixties. As Silverberg has told us in various memoirs—especially the 1987 “The Making of a Science Fiction Writer”—he was attracted to the genre by its romantic marvels and by its Lovecraftian sense of nostalgia for forgotten wonders (RR 144–149). He intended to attain commercial success and recognition through a prodigious commitment to hard work (SBTC 19–23). Indeed, ambition and youthful hubris, and sheer economic necessity, compelled him to become what Claeson has called a “fiction factory” during his early period (RS 9–21). For, despite later expressions of guilt over using his talent irresponsibly, he was after all attempting to make a living as a full-time writer, using the available markets (SBTC 19–21).

At no point in his frenetic apprenticeship did Silverberg seem to turn his back on the desire to produce work of some quality. Indeed, his initial publications showed promise, and despite his later disenchantment with many of them, some have interest and merit, although many were dominated by melodrama and naive optimism. As James Gunn has recently argued (“Worldview” 94), the world outlook of American science fiction has been essentially optimistic, unlike the more ironic vision of literary modernism. This view is strongly supported by Thomas Claeson’s study of early twentieth-century magazine science fiction, *Some Kind of Paradise* (1985). However, its optimism struck a chord in the young Silverberg, although of course he had his critical and satirical side (RR 150–152).

Silverberg deliberately tried to adapt his work to fit existing formulas and audience expectations, by no means the worst possible training for a writer. To a sympathetic reader many of the faults of Silverberg’s early novels are due to immaturity, inexperience, and haste. This is not to say, however, that his long works of these years contain much merit.

Not surprisingly perhaps, Silverberg’s first published novel was a juvenile or young adult story, *Revolt on Alpha C* (1955), published by the hardcover firm of Thomas Crowell. This novel was completed while Silverberg was still a student at Columbia, although he was already nourishing his literary ambitions. In fact, he was living in a boarding house not far from the university that happened to house another tenant with a bright future, a young writer named Harlan Ellison. The latter was not long removed from his native Ohio, and would gain a brilliant reputation as a short story writer and as a critic and satirist of popular culture. Another neighbor was the talented but erratic Randall Garrett, who would be a collaborator on a pair of early novels (RS 10). In fact, despite years of determined writing but few significant sales, by 1954 Silverberg was making a very dedicated effort to become a professional writer (RR 159–173).

As Silverberg has recalled in an introductory essay for a recent edition of *Revolt on Alpha C*, the novel grew out of his harsh criticism of another juvenile for a fan magazine, which, in turn, led to an association with Crowell. Much to his dismay, his efforts to produce a publishable novel involved him in much anguished re-writing, but his youthful initiation into the world of professional authorship needs no further comment here, except as it illustrates the rather typical brashness and hubris of a talented young writer (ROAC v-vii).

Silverberg's first published novel was a slight but readable story, describing a world of interplanetary colonization that is familiar to readers of Robert Heinlein's juvenile fiction, such as *Red Planet* (1949). As in Heinlein's young adult novels, a youthful protagonist finds himself separated from adult authority on an unfamiliar world, but heroically rises to the occasion and helps to preserve a world of technologically advanced commercial imperialism, dominated by white Anglo-Saxon male scientists, administrators, and military leaders. However, one difference from the conventional Heinlein story appears in *Revolt on Alpha C*: the military leader, Captain Reinhardt, is authoritarian, perhaps even a crypto-fascist, and Silverberg's young protagonist, Larry Stark, learns to distrust his authority and to support the cause of rebellious colonists. As a supporter of the rebels, however, Larry is naive and conventional, for he finds a rationale in the Declaration of Independence, not in Marx (a potentially incendiary presence in a young adult novel of 1955). It is, however, an augury of Silverberg's future writing to find a political conflict at the heart of his first novel.

Revolt on Alpha C was successful enough on its limited terms, but despite this promising start in the young adult field, Silverberg did not devote his main effort to such novels during the next few years. He did return to this market in the forgettable melodrama of *Starman's Quest* (1958), where a young space pilot finds his twin brother and the secret of an interstellar drive and power source after some implausible adventures; and again in the slight but appealing children's tale, *Lost Race of Mars* (1960), where two lost children on Mars discover an ancient race of Martians, a tale discussed in a later chapter. Although Silverberg has never completely abandoned writing for younger audiences, his occasional forays into such fiction would not produce anything distinctive until the sixties.

Although Silverberg was a published novelist by the time he received his undergraduate degree from Columbia, graduation and the marriage that followed obliged him to turn to the world of "adult" science fiction, as he hastily produced a number of adventure and suspense novels, mostly for magazine serialization and Ace paperbacks. During this period, he set the goal of producing around 50,000 publishable words a month, and he usually met it (RS 10-11).

His second novel, *The 13th Immortal* (1957), was a wildly melodramatic performance that illustrated, without consciously intending to, all that has been wrong with pulp science fiction, the traditions of which the Ace editors were perpetuating in their double-novel editions.² In the postdisaster future of this story, an obscure youth named Dale Kesley is propelled into the middle of events that threaten a diminished civilization, a static world ruled by a council of dukes who—thanks to a longevity treatment—are considered “immortal.” Not only does Kesley emerge as a hero, helping to save civilization and restore a spirit of scientific progress, but he also discovers that amnesia programming has blocked out knowledge of his true father, a powerful duke ruling a section of the earth from a fortress in Antarctica. As a reward for his heroism and his brilliance as a scientist, Kesley receives a longevity treatment that makes him one of the godlike council of immortals. Silverberg displays erudition by introducing a colony of bohemians whose motto is taken from Rabelais’s fictional abbey of Theleme and a cybernetic city named Wiener. Not even Stanley Weinbaum in the immature romanticism of his novel *The Black Flame* (1939) could surpass the implausibility of this adolescent fantasy. *The 13th Immortal* is simply a new version—made more plausible by some postulated pseudo-technology—of the traditional fairy tale plot in which an unknown youth gains a mysterious power or weapon, performs various exploits, marries the king’s daughter, and becomes a king himself. As Brian Aldiss has noted, science fiction may often be a disguised fairy tale (TYS 212).³

However, Silverberg revealed more characteristic talents in his next novel, *Master of Life and Death* (1957), where the focus is on political intrigue, although again the fate of civilization hangs in the balance. Here the hero is the clever deputy director of the bureau for world population control in a twenty-third-century earth where a world government struggles with overpopulation. To make things worse, the hero must deal with the death of his boss, solidifying his own position in the face of threatened blackmail, the invention of an “immortality serum” that will exacerbate the population problem, and an alien ambassador who announces opposition to colonizing other planets (which might provide relief from the population problem). Silverberg’s hero confronts these difficulties using guile, political skill, and liberal humanitarian principles, and at least temporarily overcomes the obstacles to alleviating social tensions.

Although Silverberg has said in a reprint of this novel that his chief concern was managing a complex plot, which he handles dexterously, we can see that he placed credible social issues at the center of his extrapolated future (CFDMLD 183–185). In many ways, the novel anticipates the social and political conflicts in later and more accomplished works. Walton, the hero, though clever and resourceful, is human and flawed; but he is also a liberal humanist at heart. However, although Walton acts on admirable principles, he clearly enjoys wielding power and being “master of life and

death.” At this early moment, Silverberg does not bother to explore the darker side of Walton’s love for power, but his mature works would treat such characters more critically.

Although this novel was not the actual end of Silverberg’s apprenticeship, as he naively hoped (CFDMLD 183), it was a step in the right direction. Several of Silverberg’s better novels from the fifties emphasize political intrigue and social issues from the cold war era, or the Age of Conformity. *Invaders from Earth* (1958) takes a disillusioned advertising man (who has learned that the agency’s aims are not always moral) into a conflict where human imperialism threatens to exploit and destroy an alien species on Ganymede. This is an indirect comment on racism and the industrialized world’s attitudes toward the third world. However, most of the action is routine melodrama, although the novel was highly praised by Claeson (RS 12). *Stepsons of Terra* (1958) blends espionage and time travel with concern about interstellar colonialism and the relationship between former colonies and the other planet.

Collision Course (1961, 1959 magazine publication) offered an intergalactic melodrama about the need for peace between two very different species—space-exploring terrestrials and an alien warlike species called the Norglans. This story, like later *Star Trek* treatments of conflict between the Federation and the Klingon Empire, offered an oblique cold war comment on the need for peaceful co-existence, reflecting anxiety about potential nuclear holocaust.

Perhaps the best of these political novels is *Recalled to Life* (1959 magazine publication; 1962; revised edition, 1972), which Silverberg respected enough to re-publish in a somewhat re-written version during his third period, when his mature fiction was winning awards and accolades. Avoiding the formula melodrama of its predecessors, this work deals with the social impact of a process developed to resurrect the “recently dead.” Silverberg does a commendable job of describing the media treatment of such a discovery and the public excitement and fear—including the responses of political groups of all persuasions—resulting from such a discovery. Eventually, Silverberg’s hero, James Harker, a former liberal governor of New York now listlessly practicing law, becomes emotionally involved with the cause of the resurrection process. Defending the research foundation that developed it, Harker is himself attacked and vilified, but he finally demonstrates the efficacy of the discovery by voluntarily becoming the first to die and be revived.

Silverberg’s revised version makes the novel more smoothly readable but fails to eliminate two of its weaknesses: essentially Harker is the only character delineated with any depth, and the treatment of the process of his dying and being revived does not depict the real anxiety such an experience would engender. Nevertheless *Recalled to Life* again demonstrates Silverberg’s early skill at depicting social attitudes and Machiavellian political intrigue.

During this time, Silverberg also published a number of less plausible melodramatic novels—many of them expansions of magazine stories—which have less social relevance or plausibility to recommend them. *Starhaven* (1958), for instance, published under the name of Ivar Jorgenson, imitates the rapid-paced “thrill-a-minute” space adventure associated with Edmond Hamilton and the early Jack Williamson. It describes the perils of a beachcomber who takes sanctuary on an outlaw planet and turns out to be an undercover agent for the star patrol. Reprinted by Ace in a “double” edition (1959) with Hamilton’s late novel, *The Sun Smasher*, *Starhaven* demonstrates to an objective reader of both novels that Silverberg’s imitation of thirties-style pulp fiction is not as entertaining as the real thing.

Silverberg also challenged the limits of credibility with other escapist “space opera” novels, such as *Aliens from Space* (1958) and *Invisible Barriers* (1958), published under the name David Osborne; *Lest We Forget Thee, Earth* (1958) and *The Plot against Earth* (1959), published under the name Calvin M. Knox; and *The Planet Killers* (1959). These were all in the tradition of Hamilton and E. E. “Doc” Smith, blended with touches of A. E. Van Vogt and the early L. Sprague de Camp. (Readers may gain insight into the term “space opera” from the article in EOSF, pp. 1138–1140; Aldiss also describes thirties space opera in TYS, pp. 207–215.) Even these formula tales are not completely devoid of social interest. *Lest We Forget Thee, Earth* introduces a world where earth has been the victim of a holocaust, a theme that has been of some interest to Silverberg, no doubt in part because of his Jewish heritage. The threat of a genocidal attack on earth—perhaps it may be called a “planetocide”—also provides the premise of *The Planet Killers*. In *The Plot against Earth* Terra is threatened by galactic enemies who scheme, not to destroy it, but to maintain it in a primitive third-world condition as a commercial dependency. In “The Silent Invaders,” the novella for *Infinity Science Fiction* that Silverberg would later expand into a full-length novel (1963), intergalactic espionage in a paranoid society is enhanced by the introduction of telepathy. The story touches on the theme of human isolation that would preoccupy Silverberg’s mature works. Although Silverberg attained some commercial success with such formula adventures, they obviously diverted his energies from more worthy projects.

Two Silverberg projects that—from a later perspective—appear more worthwhile than his adventure novels are the pair of books about the planet Nidor, written with Randall Garrett, and *The Seed of Earth* (written in 1958–59, but not published until 1962), Silverberg’s major effort to break into the coveted ranks of Doubleday’s or Ballantine’s science fiction list.

According to Silverberg, the genesis of the Nidor books (published under the name of Robert Randall) was a calculated attempt in 1956 to write a serial designed to appeal to John W. Campbell’s vision of “terrestrial colo-

nizing of the stars (SP 215–216). In their original version, Silverberg and Garrett described the development of rationalism and scientific progress on an alien planet as viewed by visiting observers from earth who are monitoring and guiding the barbarians toward enlightenment. Campbell, however, was canny enough to challenge the collaborators to reverse the point of view of their predictable story line and present the narrative from the alien point of view (SP 216–217). Undoubtedly, the resulting novels are more imaginative and dramatic, although the technologically advanced terrestrial federation, motivated by the ethos of 1950s Western culture, remains the superior power.

However, the reversal of narrative point of view forced Silverberg and Garrett to imagine a different world with an agrarian culture from the inside, and to provide glimpses of its sacred scriptures, traditions, and folkways. Such requirements seemed to impose a greater mood of realism on the novels. As a distant planet shielded from its sun by a great barrier of permanent cloud, Nidor possesses physical conditions that are in contrast to those on earth and a different ecology (the concept was abroad, although the word was not yet common at this time); and these have influenced its economy, its religion, its legends, and its folk traditions. In general, Nidor is depicted as a drier and cooler version of Venus, and Garrett and Silverberg are required to invent only a limited number of its cultural traditions—just enough to support the story (not until Herbert's 1965 *Dune* would the construction of planetary ecologies and cultures become intensely detailed). Nevertheless, the two novels, richly suggestive as most of the early Silverberg is not, reveal imaginative potential.

The first novel, *The Shrouded Planet* (1957), loosely stitches together three novelettes about three rebellious generations of a Nidor family, who reject the planet's static traditions in quest of scientific advance. The authors provide credible characterizations of the chief rebels, Kiv, Sindi, and Norvis, all of whom come into conflict with the Nidor authorities, who rely on subjective interpretation of ecclesiastical tradition to rule. Indeed, the plucky Sindi is one of the best feminine characters in the work of the early Silverberg.

Their opposition to Nidor tradition brings the rebels into contact with the visiting terrestrial observers, who offer enigmatic encouragement. The full journey from reliance on superstition to rationalism and scientific enlightenment is concluded in *The Dawning Light* (1958), a more coherent and unified novel in which Norvis grows into a hero of victorious rationalism. The theme of these novels is by no means innovative in science fiction: in fact, the two books present a loosely allegorical portrait of Western culture's own struggle to transcend superstition and obscurantism in order to enter a world of reason and applied science. If the novels treat this conflict in rather simple terms, they nonetheless offer a characteristic vision of the optimistic worldview of post-Enlightenment Western culture. Ironically, Sil-

verberg would return to the theme of the Nidor books and present the human journey from tradition to rationalism in a less optimistic form in *Kingdoms of the Wall* (1993).

Unfortunately, the collaboration that produced Nidor was relatively temporary, and the planet's immediate possibilities were realized with the completion of its journey to rationalism.⁴ However, Silverberg's *The Seed of Earth* was a determined bid to break through conventional formulas, or at least to attain hardcover publication by Doubleday or Ballantine. Beginning as a magazine short story, but intensively revised during its expansion to novel length, *The Seed of Earth* attempts a realistic look at the colonization of another planet from the point of view of an Ohio college boy drafted to be a colonist and reluctantly adjusting to the demands of his new world (SE xii). In the process, Mike Dawes makes the transition from boyhood to manhood, but he is no cardboard hero. Physically inferior to another male colonist, Dawes unheroically absorbs a terrible beating from the bully before his intelligence and moral strength establish him as a leader in a crisis. Moreover, tested by trials on an alien world, Dawes develops maturity about love, outgrowing a schoolboy crush on the innocent but helpless Carol and choosing to marry the tough-minded and sexually experienced Cherry.

However, despite an obvious concern to create realistic characters and allow them to shape the plot, *The Seed of Earth* remains a failure. Its conflicts are resolved too hastily. In addition, Silverberg undermined the realistic credibility he was trying to create by the introduction of menacing unexplained aliens bent on tampering with the colonists' minds (a motif that has obsessed Silverberg throughout his career). Evidently the major publishers had similar misgivings, for *The Seed of Earth* was rejected by both Doubleday and Ballantine, much to Silverberg's chagrin. His frustration was heightened when a projected paperback edition fell through, although the novel was eventually serialized in *Galaxy* and published by Ace in another double edition (SE xiii–xv). Like other early works, *The Seed of Earth* reveals promise, but Silverberg was still too inexperienced to produce successful realistic novels. However, the book stands as evidence of serious intentions, even during the time of his apprenticeship when commercial publication was a primary concern.

It is tempting to suggest that Silverberg saved his best writing of the early period for the shorter forms. However, the magazine shorter fiction of these years was often merely an earlier and briefer version of the adventure novels (RS 11). At any rate, Silverberg's early short fiction contains its share of commercial hack-work. Surprisingly, there were even forays into the genre of swashbuckling adventure fantasy in the mode of Edgar Rice Burroughs, A. Merritt, and Robert E. Howard. "Spawn of the Deadly Sea" (in *Science Fiction Adventures*, 1957) pits an indomitable hero of the Conan type against particularly repulsive monsters and villains. Pursuing further rewards,

Silverberg would later expand it into novel length as *Conquerors from the Darkness* (1965). He worked the same territory with heroes who battle mysterious dehumanizing observers and brutal enslaving invaders from space or elsewhere in the amusing "Slaves of the Star Giants" (1957), reprinted in *Next Stop the Stars* (1962); and in the labored group of stories "Valley beyond Time" (1957), "The Flame and the Hammer" (1957), "The Wages of Death" (1958), and "Spacerogue" (1958), which would be reprinted in a paperback volume, *Valley beyond Time*, in 1973. These may be judged as competent professional exercises in a form of action adventure, which was an inappropriate and misconceived use of Silverberg's narrative talents. It is fair to say that—if such escapist stories are worth doing—Robert E. Howard, whom Silverberg would later caricature, did this sort of thing better.

Romantic adventure fantasy was only one variety of the short fiction Silverberg produced in the fifties. In the more than 220 science fiction stories (Clareson's figure, RS 11) Silverberg published in these short years, we can easily identify three other categories: (1) tales of space exploration and terrestrial imperialism in the mode of Robert Heinlein; (2) speculative suspense stories that attempt to explore a provocative social or philosophical idea; and (3) darkly ironic or satirical stories, which were more difficult to market because they opposed the prevailing optimism of the genre and its readers (RS 15). A glance at representatives of each group will provide a more favorable view of Silverberg's apprentice years,

Silverberg's tales of space exploration and colonization generally assume the world vision of Campbell's *Astounding* and show the influence of the future history series by Robert Heinlein and Isaac Asimov. Though not without moments of irony, their tone is generally optimistic and affirmative: terrestrials are generally the superior species and the advancing science of Western culture is triumphant. As in the early and middle Heinlein, the major virtue of many of the protagonists is a competent professionalism.

However, all is not unrelieved optimism. In "The Old Man" (1957), Silverberg suggests in an economical story something of the expense of body and spirit for space pilots. The point-of-view character, a veteran astronaut, spends much of the story reflecting on his experience and superiority to younger and untried pilots. To his shock, however, he is suddenly ordered to retire, despite his belief in his competence. This is an unpleasant surprise for the protagonist, but there is an even greater one for the reader, who learns in the conclusion that the aged and veteran pilot is only twenty-one. The somber tone of this tale is reminiscent of Cordwainer Smith's "Scanners Live in Vain" (1950), in its depiction of the physical and psychological demands of mastering space travel.

Most of the stories in this group have a more affirmative or amusing tone. In "Double Dare" (1956), an alien species, the Domerangi, seem to be toying with a pair of captive human scientists, but human ingenuity prevails.

Ordered to duplicate a "perpetual motion" machine developed by the aliens, the humans invent one of their own, only to learn that the machine of the aliens was a counterfeit. In fact, the aliens had aimed, by arousing the competitive instincts of the humans, to exploit the scientists' intelligence. Aware of their superior abilities, the humans devise a machine for escape. As in the Campbell vision of the future (presented in the Nidor novels), human intelligence will win.

Other colonization stories explore a variety of future conflicts. "Mind for Business" (1956) presents the drama of a terrestrial ship stranded between earth's empire and an alien system. Predictably, the marooned human trader outwits the aliens because of his business acumen, to which the aliens are oblivious. Not all the human species is admirable, however, as "En Route to Earth" (1957) demonstrates by describing in a humorous tone the flaws of the passengers aboard a gigantic intergalactic starship returning from tourism and trade missions. However, the species is admirably adaptable in a crisis: in "New Men for Mars" (1957), humanity mutates into a new form under the stress of an alien environment. Silverberg frequently introduces wise and experienced professionals—similar to Heinlein heroes—in these stories. They are needed to resolve some of the unpleasant results of colonialism. In "One Way Journey" (1957; reprinted WTC 1982), the point-of-view character is Commander Warshow, a humane officer who labors to liberate a young spaceman from an obsessive love for a woman of a primitive species on the backward planet of Kollidor. Although successful in freeing young Falk, Warshow reflects ruefully that the crewman will not be grateful: "No child ever really forgives the parent who casts him from the womb" (WTC 145). The cost of command is emotionally expensive.

The responsibility of command also brings its moral dilemmas in a more ambitious story, "The Overlord's Thumb" (1958), where Commander John Devall is faced by local aliens on a colony planet who demand to try some of his men for what they consider a crime. Surprisingly, behaving like a humane liberal, Devall surrenders his men to be tried by alien laws and judicial methods—an action contrary to the tradition of American military leadership prior to the 1950s. A thoughtful moral statement as well as a potentially tragic ending is avoided by Silverberg's manipulation to create an ending favorable to the terrestrials. Thus, the story endorses liberal attitudes without facing their possible cost. Unfortunately, such moral sleight of hand tends to mar a good deal of the early fiction.

Obviously, Silverberg wrote plausible stories about earth's future colonization of other worlds, many of them reprinted in such later collections as *Next Stop the Stars* or *Dimension Thirteen*. At this point, Silverberg appears to have been largely sympathetic to the Heinlein-Campbell version of the process. His stories suggest that there are flaws in the humans involved, but generally they do not offer adequate criticism of the human cost of the process.

As we have already noted, however, Silverberg was willing to move beyond the ethos of Campbell and Heinlein. More urbane is a group of exploratory and speculative stories, including "The Outbreeders," "Counterpart," "Eve and the 23 Adams," "Dark Companion," "Hidden Talent," "The Shrines of Earth," "Birds of a Feather," "His Brother's Weeper," "The Songs of Summer," and "The Man Who Never Forgot." Although these stories tend to be more romantic or more humorous than ironic in tone, they contain extrapolations, characters, and ironies that are intimations of the mature writer.

A glance at a representative selection confirms this, but some of the stories contain unconsciously sexist attitudes. In "The Outbreeders" (1959), ethnic chauvinism is satirized in a jocular Romeo and Juliet situation involving colonists on a primitive world. Taboos against intermarriage between members of their clans lead to a romantic involvement between Ryly, a member of the Baille clan, and Joanne, a lively woman from the Clingert clan. The intense attraction of forbidden love is heightened by the sudden infatuation of Ryly's brother for Joanne, a lively and manipulative minx with a quick tongue; but tragedy is avoided when Joanne produces a sister who closely resembles her so that both brothers may have their hearts' desires.

Human mating practices are also treated humorously in "Eve and the 23 Adams" and "His Brother's Weeper," which deal with imagined romantic customs of the future. "Eve and the 23 Adams" (1958; but reprinted as "Eve and the Twenty-four Adams" in DT, 1968) describes the predicament of a starship crew accustomed to hiring a prostitute to satisfy their carnal urges during long flights. Unfortunately, they fail to get a professional. When a naively innocent young woman has been brought on board by mistake, they resort to a drug that renders her semi-conscious and receptive to the crew. Such a form of sanctioned rape seems to be treated with approval, though the protagonist feels sufficient guilt to wish to marry this Eve at the end of the journey. However, one of the reasons for his desire is her alleged expertise as a lover. The callous and sexist attitudes of the crew are not characteristic of the early Silverberg, but they reveal a mood that could produce the pornographic work of the early sixties.

Male sexuality is also the target of the humor of "His Brother's Weeper" (1959), which uses a deadpan tone for more comic effect. Here a bumbling academic, Peter Martlett, goes to a colony planet to settle the affairs of a deceased younger brother, a talented composer but a noted womanizer. The will legally bequeaths Peter three of his sibling's fiancées, all of whom wish to transfer their affections to him. What appears to be a sketch for an early *Playboy* story takes an unexpected plot twist, when the "deceased" shows up, after faking his death to avoid debt. Both brothers are soon conventionally married off to two of the ladies, although they face their fate ruefully.

At this point, Silverberg—or perhaps his editors—was not quite ready to explore human sexuality as adventurously as he would later. Even in his Columbia days, Silverberg was willing to experiment with technique in “The Songs of Summer” (1956), which he has called an “extremely ambitious technical stunt, an attempt at telling a story through a series of fragmented monologs” (NSTS xiv). However, the technical experimentation does not disguise a conventional plot: a contemporary New Yorker is transplanted to a post-disaster agrarian world, where he quickly seizes power. Nevertheless, Dugan’s arrogant misuse of his power, displacing the tribe’s sage, humiliating its promising young man, Kennon, and taking his woman reverses the usual story expectations. Dandrin, the sage, and Kennon work together to bind the community into a telepathic communion that overpowers their oppressor and puts him into a permanent trance. Thus the experiment in narrative is accompanied by satire on twentieth-century attitudes.

More poignant is the impressive and durable “The Man Who Never Forgot” (1957), an early story dealing with the burden of expanded mental powers. Tom Niles, the unfortunate protagonist, suffers from the ambiguous gift of total recall; even the most casual details of a chance encounter long ago are accessible in his memory. The gift proves to be a curse to him for much of his life as he wanders from city to city, reliving his unhappy childhood in a small Ohio town and comparing himself to such haunted romantic wanderers as the Flying Dutchman and the Wandering Jew. An accident on a return to his hometown hospitalizes him and reconciles him to his mother when she comes to visit him. He concludes that immaturity and self-pity have helped to create his sense of misfortune and alienation. Although this happy resolution is not entirely convincing, “The Man Who Never Forgot” effectively describes some aspects of the cost of possessing extraordinary talent, a major theme in Silverberg’s best work.

Although Silverberg’s early speculative stories are frequently annoying or disappointing, their strength often surprises a reader. However, the early group of ironic tales is more impressive.

Even in his undergraduate days, Silverberg was experimenting with the techniques of ironic modernist fiction, with the composition while at Columbia in 1954 of “Road to Nightfall,” a condensed tale of cannibalism in a bleak future New York. A number of early stories demonstrate the realism, grim irony, and horror of human isolation that are part of what Claesdon would call the “dark side” of Silverberg’s early short fiction (RS 30–44). In addition to “Road to Nightfall,” a considerable body of the fifties stories exhibit this darker view of human existence: such stories as “Ozymandias,” “There Was an Old Woman,” “The Four,” “Passport to Sirius,” “Birds of a Feather,” “Counterparts,” “World of a Thousand Colors,” “Absolutely Inflexible,” “The Iron Chancellor,” “Solitary,” “Certainty,” “Warm Man,” and “Prime Commandment” have provided the most enduring

strengths of later collections, such as *World of a Thousand Colors* (1982). Perhaps Silverberg would have produced others had there been more commercial encouragement.

Although Clareson has given an account of some of these tales (RS 17–21), his analysis is rather uneven. It is here that Silverberg's satirical social vision and his horror of personal isolation, both important elements in his work, begin to emerge. Consider for instance, the seminal "Road to Nightfall," which presents both a grimly imagined future and the anguish of a lonely protagonist trying to maintain his dignity. Silverberg's vision in this story is so bleak that it was difficult to place the story in a magazine (as he relates in TBRs 102). Finally, "Road to Nightfall" was rescued by Harlan Ellison, whose support encouraged its printing by an editor inaugurating a new magazine in 1958. This episode illustrates the difficulties of being daring or experimental, even in short stories, for the science fiction magazines of the conformist fifties.

A quick glance at "Road to Nightfall" reveals that even as an undergraduate, Silverberg was capable of powerful writing. "Nightfall" paints a harsh portrait of New York, a hundred years hence, as a city degenerating into barbarism and cannibalism in the aftermath of a nuclear war. The main problem is the shortage of food, although people also suffer from other deprivations. Silverberg's protagonist, Katterson, is determined to resist cannibalism as long as he can; but by the end his resources and will are exhausted, and he accepts the inevitable, deciding that survival justifies this dehumanizing practice. The story gains momentum from an economical style, and its ending is uncompromising. As a grim vision of a New York regressing to barbarism, it foreshadows the treatment of urban wastelands in recent novels and films, especially those of the "cyberpunk" school.

If "Road to Nightfall" is an early gem, some of Silverberg's other early ironic tales are equally impressive. "Warm Man" (1957), for instance, describes a "gray flannel suit" suburbia of the fifties in acidulous terms reminiscent of John Updike or John Cheever, Silverberg's contemporaries, and masters of the realistic short story. "Warm Man" is set in a suburban cesspool of envy and hatred, into which comes a saintly stranger named Hallinan, whose mysterious empathy enables him to win the confidence of the frustrated backbiters and philanderers around him. In reality, Hallinan is a telepath who considers himself a "compulsive empath," or receiver, and his existence comes to a sudden and tragic end when he becomes receptive to the hate and frustration of a nine-year-old boy who is a "compulsive sender" and a complete misfit (TBRs 44). Obviously the tragic irony of this resolution anticipates the bitter conclusion to *Dying Inside*, the narrator of which is also a "compulsive empath."

Another story that aims at tragic irony is "Ozymandias" (1958), which introduces a recurring theme into Silverberg's work: the sense of the tragic grandeur and ultimate futility of an extraordinary species of the distant

past. In Shelley's poem that supplies the title, it is a forgotten tyrant whose arrogance and grandeur are meaningless now, like the biblical Nebuchadnezzar. For Silverberg, however, it is the species as much as the individual that becomes tragic through blind egoism. "Ozymandias" ends with the narrator expressing a sense of foreboding. Like the best of Silverberg's early short stories, "Ozymandias" is a rebuke to human arrogance and an oblique treatment of the anxiety over nuclear war, the recurrent nightmare of the fifties.

Mordant irony also underlies the vision of "The Iron Chancellor" (1958), a memorable story about a family that buys a robot programmed to monitor their eating habits to help them lose weight. The robot is impervious to reasonable argument, and determined to enforce its rules even after the family has lost enough pounds. Desperately the family tries to change the robot's programming or to get help from the outside, but the robot frustrates their efforts, locking them in and even tricking the man called in to service it. At the end, the robot's intractable control of their lives seems about to ensure their starvation. Claeson calls this story a treatment of the Frankenstein motif, but this comparison is only partially accurate (RS 12). Silverberg's iron chancellor is not a sentient being, but an inhuman machine, which is precisely the point the story intends to make. In fact, "The Iron Chancellor," as in horror stories by Henry Kuttner and Ray Bradbury in the forties, is a satire on technology out of control and destroying humanity.

Somewhat closer to the irony of Mary Shelley's novel is "There Was an Old Woman" (1958), a horrifying tale of an experiment in raising children that backfires. Here a woman of scientific genius has conceived a plan to prove her theory that environment is superior to genetic inheritance. Developing the means to split a fertilized ovum into thirty-two parts, she retires to the back country of Wisconsin, becomes impregnated by a lusty local farmhand, and gives birth to thirty-two identical siblings. Although one dies, the others grow to maturity, and the mother educates each one to have a different destiny or vocation. However, when the sons grow up, they grow bored with their specialized vocations and rebel. Finally, they conspire to murder their heartless mother, as a punishment for her use of them in her experiment. In short, the desire for human freedom and dignity will assert itself against a dehumanizing rationalized plan. This fine story illustrates Silverberg's irony at its keenest.

Mature irony manifests itself grimly in stories like "The Four" (1958) and "World of a Thousand Colors" (1957). "The Four" describes a future where humanity has retreated to underwater cities like New Baltimore in the Atlantic. The protagonist, Mary Foyle, is a heartless young telepath who lusts for power. She manipulates and bullies three other telepaths into helping her escape the doomed undersea city, for she is sure that life on the surface is better. However, her dominance over the others is ironically pun-

ished when the surface world turns out to be as hostile to life as everyone has thought.

"World of a Thousand Colors" has a similar mood, but the narrative describes with satiric relish a case of crime and punishment. The crime is committed by Jolvar Hollinrede, a rogue and confidence man, who murders another man to assume his identity in order to gain entrance to the "World of a Thousand Colors." There, in an alleged paradise, beings supposedly undergo transmutation into a state of pure spirit and find lasting happiness. Hollinrede assumes his deceptions will not be discovered, but when he undergoes "the Test," he finds that his psychic essence is black. His six companions in the test have other colors and need a seventh whose color will complete the rainbow. Since black will not produce the necessary harmony of colors, the others murder Hollinrede, for they will not be denied their own transformation. This seamless fable about the consequences of crime is a sustained performance far different from formula adventures.

It is sometimes said that science fiction is unusual in the number of youthful prodigies it has spawned. Quite a number of names can be produced to support the claim: Stanley Weinbaum, the young Isaac Asimov, the young Ray Bradbury, C. M. Kornbluth, Samuel R. Delaney, and so on. Yet only a few of the stories, such as Weinbaum's "A Martian Odyssey" and Asimov's "Nightfall," by these early bloomers are memorable. It can also be claimed that the initial success of science fiction's youthful prodigies has corresponded to a certain immaturity in their audience. Quite clearly the genre exercises great appeal for adolescents and young adults, as Thomas Disch has recently observed (DOSIMO 1-2).

The early Silverberg can be described as a prodigy, but most of the fiction he produced in these years—especially the most market oriented—is marked by immaturity. During this time, he worked too hastily to turn out many different kinds of stories, from contrived adventure to serious social criticism. The results were not equally happy, and much of the early writing may seem wasted effort, except for its monetary rewards for the author. Indeed, looking back from the perspective of 1974, in his famous essay, "Sounding Brass, Tinkling Cymbal," Silverberg expressed guilt over his surrender to commercial formulas and described himself as a divided man, torn between mundane hack-work and higher ambitions (SBTC 25-26).

Silverberg's self-criticism is much too harsh. In reality, he was not only establishing his presence in the magazines and paperbacks but he was also gaining a valuable professional apprenticeship. The faults of his early writing are obvious: most of it is predictable and dominated by the demands of plot; characterization is often flat; and the narrative style, while smooth, is thin in texture and seldom explores the metaphorical possibilities of language. While inventing his stories, he was gaining a mastery over the plot formulas

and what Gary Wolfe has called the iconography of science fiction (TKTU). He was also undergoing a process that most young writers must experience: discovering which plots and themes were most stimulating to his imagination and more congenial to his experience and intellectual interests. If his work was largely imitative, he was learning which models to imitate.

In later years, the lessons he was absorbing would serve him well. Although the satirical and ironic stories seem to provide the best indication of his future work, much of the early fiction contains hints of the writer he would become.

3

The Growth of a Journeyman, 1961–1968

As Silverberg has described it, rather dramatically, his frustrations with full-time science fiction writing had peaked by the end of 1959. Except for his juveniles he had not broken into the premier hardcover markets. The constant effort to produce masses of marketable prose, and the need to play salesman in trips to editors' offices was taking its toll. In addition, there was retrenchment in the science fiction magazine world (SBTC 24).

Not surprisingly, he turned to other markets. In 1960, he had completed a western begun by another author, *Buchanan on the Prod*, for Fawcett paperbacks (RSPSB 46). He also published a non-fiction popular science book, following in the path of Isaac Asimov. However, there was a more lucrative market. Favorable court decisions that allowed the unexpurgated text of D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* to be printed cleared the way for a new flood of pornography. For a couple of years, Silverberg produced fiction for this specialized genre, under a variety of pseudonyms. Although Silverberg has never denied laboring in this vineyard, he has understandably shown no interest in having this writing resurrected.

A better opportunity arose in the production of non-fiction books on historical and popular science subjects. These books were mainly directed at young readers, and Silverberg had three major qualifications for writing them: (1) he was a thorough and reliable researcher; (2) he wrote smooth and readable expository prose; (3) he had developed a reputation as an energetic and disciplined professional who could be counted on to produce his required wordage (SBTC 26–28).

Such a change in his career proved to be very beneficial to Silverberg. The expectation of a steady income liberated him from the necessity of writing formula science fiction. Then too, while the work was demanding of time and intellectual effort, it was less draining on his imagination. Finally, Silverberg's professional non-fiction writing enlarged his intellectual horizons. Especially useful were the archaeological and anthropological works, particularly in regard to non-Western cultures and societies with primitive technologies.

Of course, writers with a different temperament would have found it impossible to write fiction of any kind after demanding days engaged in research and writing non-fiction. This was clearly not the case with Silverberg, who over the next few years found time to produce some fiction. In some respects, like Philip José Farmer who labored for years as a technical writer while somehow finding time to write fiction (MLPJF 4), Silverberg was able, despite regular non-fiction responsibilities, to produce a good deal of occasional writing for the genre that had been his first love. It was, however, assumed by some writing colleagues that Silverberg had abandoned science fiction, and his own comments in a memoir helped to encourage these beliefs (SBTC 27–29). The non-fiction work would prove helpful for his imaginative writing. In certain ways, Silverberg may here be compared with one of his older contemporaries and role models, Isaac Asimov: Asimov's non-fiction popular science works were often stimulating to his creative imagination.

Then too, we should not overlook the fact that Silverberg's many non-fiction works contain some fine writing. Often he treats his subject with imaginative verve, as in the following passage from his third non-fiction book, *Lost Cities and Vanished Civilizations* (1962), which describes the world of ancient Pompeii:

Wherever you turn in Pompeii, echoes of the dead city strike you. In one rich house, a breakfast set in silver, complete with two egg cups, was found. Shopping lists were discovered. Wall paintings show religious ceremonies, games, and everyday amusements. The vats used for bleaching cloth for togas still remain. In some of the twenty bakeries, new baked loaves stand on the counters. (LCVC 29)

Silverberg's selective use of detail to evoke a site haunted by a vanished culture provides testimony to a romantic sense of the past, an attempt perhaps to recreate the mood of nostalgic wonder he had responded to in reading a passage in H. P. Lovecraft's *The Shadow Out of Time* in his youth (RR 143–144). *Lost Cities*, in fact, is still a very readable introduction to ancient cultures and it may have made a contribution to Silverberg's later creation of the cities on Majipoor and the tribal society in *At Winter's End* (1988).¹

From 1962 through 1972 Silverberg wrote at least sixty-eight non-fiction works on biology and other forms of science, and on archaeology, anthropology, popular history, and biography.² Of these, the hard science popularizations obviously have become the most quickly dated, because of rapid progress in research. More durable are the anthropological books, such as *Home of the Red Man* (1963), which remains a readable introduction to Native American cultures in North America and displays a moderate sympathy for American Indian peoples.

It is worth noting here that Silverberg's point of view in 1963—no doubt influenced by publishers and the marketplace—toward the historical treatment of Native Americans by Europeans and white North Americans is not especially polemical. However, he would later produce in *The Pueblo Revolt* (1970) a very fine study of the conflict between the Pueblo tribes of the Southwest and the early Spanish colonists. (In fact, *The Pueblo Revolt* has been reprinted by the University of Nebraska Press.) In addition, Silverberg's massive historical study, *The Search for El Dorado* (1968), also treats similar themes in describing various ruthless European expeditions, motivated by fantasies of astonishing wealth, that invaded the cultures of native peoples on both American continents. It is not coincidental that Silverberg's celebrated story "Sundance," which dramatizes the feelings of an anguished Lakota (Sioux), appeared in 1969.

Another non-fiction work of some merit for young readers is his popular biography, *John Muir: Prophet among the Glaciers* (1972), which describes the work and vision of a pioneer environmentalist. Perhaps one influence of this effort is the emergence in much of Silverberg's later work of a strong concern for preserving natural environments. However, a detailed discussion of these books would lie outside the scope of our study. What is of more relevance here is the way Silverberg's science fiction would change over the next few years, as he progressed from being a reliable journeyman novelist to an imaginative novelist willing to make technical experiments and struggle with risky themes.

Although Silverberg began to compose new science fiction stories after his position as an author of non-fiction was established, some of his efforts did not seem to show development beyond the work of his first period. The expansion of magazine stories published in the fifties into melodramatic novels continued. *The Silent Invaders* (1963), a tolerable suspense novel of interplanetary espionage, and the wretched *Conquerors from the Darkness* (1965), a swashbuckling adventure in the mode of Leigh Brackett's Mars stories and Howard's Conan stories, have already been mentioned. *One of Our Asteroids Is Missing* (1964), published by Ace under his old pseudonym of Calvin M. Knox (an amusing use of the names of Protestant reformers), returns to "space opera" formulas.

Even as he began to gain confidence and take greater risks, he produced *The Time Hoppers* (1967), an expansion of a 1956 story (RSPSB 6), reviving a plot combining time travel with anxiety over the discomforts of an overpopulated earth. Silverberg considered this novel a more serious effort than most of the earlier fiction (SBTC 31); but its dystopian theme remains imprisoned in a framework of melodramatic plot. At least, however, Silverberg here imaginatively dramatizes the conditions for ordinary people in a crowded environment, whereas in the early *Master of Life and Death* the theme of overpopulation had been merely treated as an abstraction fueling the plot. Nevertheless, *The Time Hoppers* is generally a dreary performance, with few hints of Silverberg's later treatment of the horrors of overcrowding in *The World Inside*.

Clearly, such reversions to conventional formulas in expansions of old stories do not show advances in Silverberg as a fiction writer. However, he initiated other projects. He continued to write novels for the juvenile market, for example. He was able to experiment with short fiction for Frederik Pohl's *Galaxy*. He began to gather his better early stories for collections, and to edit an anthology (SBTC 31); indeed, Silverberg's fine career as an editor of science fiction anthologies began in this period. Above all, becoming aware that the genre was changing and losing its "old pulp-magazine rigidities," he felt encouraged to attempt more original and venturesome novels (SBTC 28–29, 31–33).

Although a plan for a proposed young adult work to follow *Revolt on Alpha C* had been rejected by Crowell in 1959, Silverberg enjoyed a modest and unexpected success with the slender but engaging novel for children, *Lost Race of Mars* (1960) for Holt, Rinehart, Winston: its selection for a list of a "hundred best children's books" by the *New York Times* encouraged Silverberg to continue writing for young people (SBTC 26). As a result, he produced several novels for this market during the next few years, but, at first, his judgment about this enterprise seems a bit questionable.

Lost Race of Mars is a low-key story about two lost children from earth's Mars colony who find "Old Martians" hiding in a cave. In reality, Silverberg had aroused the emotions of curiosity and wonder, which play so large a role in childhood: in fact, he had touched the emotional vein—though not very deeply—that makes Steven Spielberg's film *E.T.* (1982) so fascinating to children, with the Old Martians playing the role of the extraterrestrial. Such a story seemed to call for a sequel, which might be expected to bring the children back and, through them as protagonists, present the story of the rise and decline of the Old Martian civilization.

However, Silverberg did not take advantage of this opportunity. He did indeed produce a sequel to *Lost Race of Mars*, or at any rate a novel using the same time setting (the period prior to the 1992 world's fair); but *Regan's Planet* (1964) is (for reasons known best to Silverberg) neither a ju-

venile novel nor an admirable adult one. Instead, it is an uneven social and political satire, blended with occasional melodrama, that deals with the manipulations of Claud Regan, a clever and unscrupulous multimillionaire promoter, who seems to have both the best and the worst faults of the pragmatic liberals of the Kennedy era. The conflict concerns Regan's plan to make the fair a success (perhaps suggested by the publicity about the 1964 New York World's Fair) by having it on a space satellite orbiting the earth (an optimistic idea that might have been spawned by the Kennedy administration's enthusiasm for space research and the race to make America the first to reach the moon).

As a publicity stunt to boost interest, Regan successfully kidnaps the Old Martians discovered in *Lost Race of Mars*, making them pawns in his fund-raising efforts. In the ensuing furor, the Old Martians become symbols of genocidal crimes, but they are returned by a repentant Regan at the end of the novel. Although he professes remorse, it is not clear that Regan understands the suffering he has caused his victims. The novel also concerns Regan's unsuccessful efforts to regain the love of his estranged wife, a temperamental society woman without intellectual virtues. Neither Regan nor his wife is able to hold the reader's sympathy for long, and Silverberg's satire seems undisciplined and without a moral center.

The presence of a couple of youthful protagonists might have redeemed the novel for a young adult market. As the novel stands, it is clearly neither a work for young adults nor a successful novel for mature adults. Silverberg had shown a talent for satire from his earliest efforts, but it would be some years before they would sustain a successful novel.

Eventually, Silverberg would write a first-rate young adult novel using the setting of *Lost Race of Mars*, but *World's Fair, 1992* did not appear until several years later (1970). In the meantime, even in the juvenile market he was feeling his way along.

However, *Time of the Great Freeze* (1964) shows genuine originality. This young adult novel set in a future ice age describes an arduous journey from New York across a frozen Atlantic Ocean to make contact with hardy survivors in London. In Silverberg's extrapolated future, the remaining human outposts are isolated underground cities throughout the world, with even radio communication problematic. As the journey will re-open the severed lines of communication between centers of civilization, the explorers who challenge the Atlantic ice are serving a higher cause than mere adventure.

Although Silverberg's youthful hero, Jim Barnes, is the son of the scientist who plans the expedition and recruits a courageous band of nonconformists, the lad shows valor and resourcefulness on his own. Becoming a leader, Jim helps the expedition overcome a host of perils: the bitter cold, savage predatory beasts, pirates who live on the ice off the New Jersey shore (a New Yorker's predictable joke at the expense of the Garden State), and finally, the suspicion and hostility of English patrols guarding the Atlantic ap-

proaches to London. Silverberg's inventiveness keeps this lively story of a wilderness trek moving, and a surprise plot twist at the end reverses readers' expectations: Jim's party of explorers is driven off by the paranoid British, but rescued by ice rovers from Argentina and taken to Buenos Aires to recuperate.

Though it is easy to dismiss *Time of the Great Freeze* as a mere adventure story, as Clareson does blithely (RS 26), the novel deserves respect. It is not only a well-imagined adventure story, but it is also a rite-of-passage novel depicting Jim's increasing maturity, as he begins to make decisions and assume more responsibility as the journey proceeds. By the end, he has passed from untried youth to manhood. Silverberg had undertaken this theme before in earlier books, especially the Nidor novels; but his persuasive treatment of it here makes *Time of the Great Freeze* his first young adult novel to display his strong narrative talents.

By contrast, *Planet of Death* (1967) is an eminently forgettable young adult novel. This dreadful narrative presents the grim survival story of another youthful hero, Roy Crawford, who flees from a framed-up murder charge on a starship mission to an unexplored planet replete with homicidal life forms, not to mention a mysterious member of the crew who begins murdering everyone. Crawford overcomes a seemingly endless series of menaces, perhaps because, being aggressive and hot tempered, he thrives on adversity and combat. This novel is a forced, tiresome performance, suggesting temporary creative exhaustion. Its characterization is sketchy, and not even the hero is very sympathetic. Whether young readers can find socially redeeming themes in *Planet of Death* is a matter of conjecture.

Better young adult novels lay ahead, however. Surprisingly, little of his previous work for young people prepares us for the imaginative vigor of *The Gate of Worlds* (1967). This novel is Silverberg's most lengthy and sustained venture into alternate history fiction, a tradition reaching back in American science fiction to the 1930s stories of Murray Leinster (Will F. Jenkins). In reality, of course, the concept of alternate history fiction is much older, as Gregory Benford has noted in the Preface to a collection of stories about a victorious Third Reich (HV 1-3) and as Brian Stableford confirms in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (23-25). Although extrapolated alternate history tales have become commonplace in the nineties, they were chiefly familiar to readers during this phase of Silverberg's career through Ward Moore's fine Civil War novel, *Bring the Jubilee* (1953), which hypothesized a divided America after a Confederate victory, and Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* (1962) in which the Axis powers had won World War II. Generally, the purpose of a serious alternate history story is to provide a fresh perspective (and perhaps an ironic comment) on the history we know and take for granted. Silverberg accomplishes this task in *The Gate of Worlds*, offering his young adult readers a new look at a possible history of America. It is worth noting that Silverberg is one of the earliest, if not the first, to

use an alternate history setting for a juvenile novel. The technique would seem to be an excellent heuristic device.

The "gate of worlds" of the title is a reference to a fictional legend of a gate leading to many different versions of historical reality. Silverberg's novel is set in one such alternate time stream, the twentieth century of a technologically backward world where the Turkish empire had conquered Europe and Great Britain in the sixteenth century, imposed its tyranny on the subject peoples, and stifled scientific and technological research. Drawing on the research for his non-fiction, Silverberg boldly extrapolates the conditions of this alternate reality: if the Turks had smothered scientific progress, it is logical to conclude that civilization would only have progressed to the steam age; and if Europe had fallen under the domination of Turkey, there would have been no European conquest of the Americas, which are called the Northern and Southern Hesperides in the novel.

Silverberg does not, however, spend much time on expository clarification. Instead, he plunges his picaresque hero, Dan Beauchamp, into a Mexico controlled by the Aztec empire and linked together by old-fashioned horse power and steam-driven cars. Only eighteen at the outset, Beauchamp is portrayed as a latter-day English adventurer, full of an explorer's zeal for fame and a soldier of fortune's longing for wealth, much like Francis Drake, Walter Raleigh, and other Elizabethan sea dogs.

Beauchamp's chief flaw is his readiness to embrace ill-advised military adventures. Finding the Aztec capital (an alternative version of Mexico City) fascinating but cruel and stultifying, he falls in with a dubious expedition conceived by an ambitious Aztec prince, Topiltzin, who, believing himself a "man of destiny," plans to take a group of warriors to the Taos country and begin the conquest of his own empire. When this enterprise leads to disastrous defeat and the apparent death of Topiltzin after a foolish attack on an Aztec stronghold, Beauchamp flees to the Pacific Northwest. Staying in a Native American village on Puget Sound, Beauchamp becomes the lover of a native woman, Takinaktu, and helps the Native American tribe rebel against oppressive Russian rule.

Like his first venture, this uprising fails, forcing Beauchamp and his lover to flee to the Southwest, where they are captured and enslaved by a roving band of savage Native Americans, resembling Comanches, who practice cannibalism. The current war leader of this tribe is Beauchamp's old captain, Topiltzin, who decides to desert the harsh southwestern plains life and take Beauchamp and Takinaktu to the Gulf Coast. There they plan another ill-advised venture to lead the Choctaws in a revolt against their Aztec oppressors. When this scheme fails, the novel ends unhappily: Beauchamp is abandoned by his Native American lover, who, weary of his military adventures, takes a passage for Africa, where several native empires are said to be vying for power. Topiltzin's foolish military venture is crushed, and this time, he dies a genuine death. Beauchamp escapes with his life and the

beginning of adult wisdom, and decides to avoid misconceived attempts at conquest in the future. Feeling the loss of Takinaktu keenly, he plans to follow her to Africa.

Such a brief summary provides a picture of the vivid alternate North America Silverberg has portrayed in *The Gate of Worlds*. It must be conceded that the world Silverberg has imagined is somewhat unfashionable at the moment, at least for dedicated adherents of political correctness. In contrast to the sentimental view that the American continents were an Eden of pastoral simplicity before Columbus and the conquistadors, Silverberg's novel projects a vision of a world of incessant conflict and savage warfare between Native American imperialists (the Aztecs) and other Native American peoples. The lesser tribes also wage sporadic but unrelenting wars among themselves.

Such a portrait of a North America never invaded by European adventurers or altered by colonization conflicts sharply with the notion that prior to European incursions, the native peoples of the Americas lived peaceably together in a simple childlike harmony with nature, much like the Eloi of H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine*. Nevertheless, the alternate world of Silverberg's novel is probably a more realistic depiction of the behavior of the human species than the current sentimentalizing of Native American life.

However, *The Gate of Worlds* is more than a lively excursion into imaginary history. It is also the story of the initiation of Dan Beauchamp into the conflicts and disappointments of life. At the end, Beauchamp has learned that his involvement in military adventurism has been foolish and that he has not valued the love of Takinaktu sufficiently. In this respect, the novel is a picaresque *Bildungsroman*, a rite-of-passage story developed with considerable energy. As such, it is one of Silverberg's better minor works. Happily, Claesron concurs in this favorable judgment, ranking *The Gate of Worlds* as second only to *Across a Billion Years* (1969) among Silverberg's young adult novels (RS 27).

Generally, until now, Silverberg's juveniles had been inferior to the best young adult novels by Robert Heinlein. However, *The Gate of Worlds* has an imaginative vitality and robust characterizations and action that may be favorably compared with Heinlein—not only to his many young adult novels, but also to the swashbuckling adventure epic *Glory Road* (1963), which in many ways seems to be addressed to juvenile readers. Indeed, it is possible to argue that *The Gate of Worlds* is superior in moral awareness to most of Heinlein's young adult works, although Silverberg has paid tribute to the importance of Heinlein's vision as an influence for writers of his generation (RR 248–252). Unlike many Heinlein heroes, Beauchamp learns the folly of impulsively joining questionable military enterprises.

Although the ending left the opportunity for a sequel to *The Gate of Worlds*, one describing Beauchamp's pursuit of Takinaktu to Africa, Silverberg has never written this book. Silverberg made a belated return to the

alternate era of *The Gate of Worlds* in an independent novella, "Lion Time in Timbuktu" (1991). This ironic study of political intrigue, however, is not a true sequel, since it does not deal with any characters from the novel. Despite the originality of *The Gate of Worlds*, Silverberg has not devoted sufficient effort to the creation of alternate history fictions to make this subgenre a major part of his canon.

It was Frederik Pohl, now the ambitious editor of *Galaxy*, who gave Silverberg the support he needed to break new ground as a novelist. Known for his fifties novels in collaboration with C. M. Kornbluth, and in particular, *The Space Merchants* (1953), Pohl had already established himself as a satirical critic of the enormous divergence between America's professed public values and the actuality of its drive for corporate profit. As editor of *Galaxy*, Pohl was continuing the magazine's tradition of social satire. Not only did Pohl buy what was then a controversial Silverberg short story, "To See the Invisible Man," in 1962, but he also encouraged Silverberg to produce regularly for the magazine (SBTC 28). The most significant result was a series of five novelettes that were combined as the "pseudo-novel" (in Silverberg's deprecating phrase) *To Open the Sky* (1967), which may be justifiably considered Silverberg's first successful novel of science fiction realism (SBTC 31).

With *To Open the Sky*, a satirical saga of the development of space travel (by teleportation, not starship), we find the first synthesis of the elements of the novelist that reviewers and such critics as Russell Letson would begin to call the "new Silverberg."³ According to Silverberg, he had originally planned the book in 1957, but was too busy to begin writing it until his association with Pohl occurred. Apparently the original plan for the novel intended it to be a satirical treatment of institutionalized religion, especially home-grown American fundamentalist organizations; but in the process of development as a series of novelettes, Silverberg's story became more complex. However, this account of his initial intentions is based on memory, since his early notes on the project were destroyed in his 1968 fire (TOTS 1).

In any event, *To Open the Sky* is presented as five episodes in an eighty-seven-year historical quest for a means of traveling to distant star systems. Each section of the novel appears to resolve a particular situation, only to have that resolution undermined by an ironic reversal in the next section. Silverberg had earlier used the technique of interlocking stories spanning the generations in the first Nidor novel; but *To Open the Sky* works on a more sophisticated level. The apparent resolution of one episode is ironically reversed, or at least put into a new perspective, by the next.

Although *To Open the Sky* presents a satirical treatment of new religious movements, this is not the main point of the story. Nor does Silverberg offer the simple opposition between deceitful religious charlatans and truth-

seeking scientists, which the mythology of the Enlightenment era has promulgated and which Wells and other early science fiction writers had so often dramatized. Instead, Noel Vorst, the founder of the new Vorster faith, is indeed a hypocritical leader whose devotion to his religion masks Machiavellian political skills; but Vorst is also a humanitarian whose real purpose is to use the cloak of his religion to mask the development of teleportation and other skills necessary for travel to the stars. To his follower Reynolds Kirby, who undergoes an authentic conversion and is portrayed as a classic disciple, Vorst is simply heroic, despite his lies and deceptions. Given the point of view of both the opening and the closing scenes, Kirby's view of Vorst makes a persuasive impression, but it should be treated skeptically.

Vorst's chief opposition comes from Christopher Mondschein, an idealist and convert who takes Vorst's religion too seriously. Like Vorst, Mondschein is a well-drawn character. Exiled to Venus, the only other habitable planet in the solar system, Mondschein starts his own religion, the Harmonist heresy, which is devoted to the worship of David Lazurus, whose "resurrection" from a cryogenic state is one of Vorst's well-staged miracles. Although Mondschein has learned Machiavellian pragmatism from studying Vorst, Mondschein's dedicated faith becomes more dangerous than Vorst's pragmatic humanism. Eventually the schism is resolved and the humanist goals of Vorsterism appear to be achieved, since humanity has gained the capacity for travel to the stars. At the close, Vorst departs for a distant star system in a ship manned by humans who have developed teleportation and other "wild talents" needed for the trip. This ending would seem to vindicate Vorst, despite his deception of his followers and his many decades of manipulating political events; and it also makes Clareson's assessment that "the narrative lacks a tone of affirmation" (RS 40) seem questionable.

However, the novel creates ambivalence. Manipulating naive religious belief for beneficial social ends may seem defensible, but such a dubious means raises moral reservations, no matter how noble the ends may be considered. At best, Vorst is not an authentic religious prophet, but merely a humanist with a vision. Moreover, as Russell Letson has commented in one of the best essays on Silverberg's work, "Vorsterism is just another in the long line of religions to sell its spiritual message for worldly power, even though that power is used for the physical good of humanity. The revealing of Vorst as more a spider-king than a prophet reinforces this idea" (RSMT 19). However, Letson also notes that the appeal of Vorst's theology is considerable, and "the book does not allow us to rest in naive skepticism" (RSMT 19).

Instead, the novel's blend of religious satire and political intrigue paradoxically suggests the power of religious imagery and belief, even though they may be misused. Again, Letson's comment is perceptive: "In the book's universe, there is a place for religious faith, for experience of the transcendent, but its proper object is not the esthetic god of the electron, but an inscrutable, impersonal force that can only be known in its effects" (RSMT

19). Thus the novel anticipates the religious explorations and quest for the transcendent of several novels in Silverberg's first major period. Ironically, however, Letson's formulation of "an inscrutable personal force that can only be known in its effects" suggests the mysterious Allah worshiped by Khalid in Silverberg's recent *The Alien Years* (1998).

The composition of *To Open the Sky* helped to open the way for other ambitious novels, including *Those Who Watch* (1967), *Hawksbill Station* (1968), *Thorns* (1967), *The Man in the Maze* (1969), *To Live Again* (1969), and *The Masks of Time* (1968). At the center of these works is an increasing concern with the perils of the isolated self, although an increasingly acerbic social observation also appears in them, especially the last one.

Probably the least known and most unfairly neglected of these novels is *Those Who Watch* (1967), which received little notice from reviewers, but which Clareson correctly considers an "important transitional novel" (RS 25), admiring the realism of its characters. Set in New Mexico and perhaps inspired by the famous tale of UFO sightings near Roswell, the novel describes the beneficial and liberating effect of alien visitors from a distant system on a trio of lonely, unhappy humans, to some degree anticipating the vision of Steven Spielberg's famous film, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977).

Unlike the threatening aliens of Silverberg's earlier novels, these are merely observers who get involved in the life of the humans they watch. Silverberg humanizes these beings, giving them sympathetic personalities and emotions. Hence the narrative tone is restrained and reassuring, somewhat in the mode of the Spielberg film: the aliens bring emotional fulfillment to the humans they befriend. However, there is no public meeting between representatives of earth and the visiting aliens, as in *Close Encounters*; instead, the emotional relationships remain private and poignant. Unlike the analogous film, Silverberg's novel describes a credible erotic relationship between a human and an alien—between Kathryn Mason, a widow longing for love, and Mirtin, one of the visitors. While some may find this aspect of the novel overly sentimental, Silverberg's portraits of the disillusioned Colonel Falkner, a failed astronaut, and of Charley Estancia, a sensitive Hopi boy struggling with his fate as a disenfranchised and "detrified" Native American, are memorable.⁴

Loneliness is also a major theme of *Hawksbill Station*, but this is a case of human isolation imposed on a political dissident and embraced with heroic stoicism. The 1968 novel version of *Hawksbill Station* was developed from a superb novella composed during a burst of creative energy in May 1966, just before Silverberg suffered a breakdown and bout with illness brought on by the fatigue that arose from combining his creative efforts with his relentless work on non-fiction, especially the massive historical work on the quest for El Dorado (SBTC 32–33). After recovery, he plunged into

rapid production of the novels mentioned above in the latter half of 1966 and in 1967. However, the hiatus in the work probably had a negative effect on the novel-length version of *Hawksbill Station*.

In the novella, for which Silverberg has expressed high regard (TBORS 95), the setting is restricted to the Cambrian epoch, which, thanks to time travel, is being used by the government as a convenient place of exile for troublesome political dissidents. The exiles' station in the Cambrian period is very bleak, since it is too early in the stages of evolution for any interesting animal life or even much scenic beauty to exist. However, Barrett, Silverberg's hero, has made a triumph of his exile, adjusting to this barren situation with a magnificent display of stoic discipline to become the leader of the dissidents and the "uncrowned king of Hawksbill Station." Although Barrett's kingship is an ironic rule, it is genuine, and the irony is heightened by the novella's resolution. Given the chance to return with the other political exiles to his own time, Barrett chooses to stay behind alone as caretaker of the station. Does Barrett enjoy having power so much that he prefers to rule a kingdom of one, rather than return to being an ordinary citizen? Perhaps this is the reason for his choice, but a better conclusion may be simply that Barrett has become completely committed to his own iron-willed stoicism, and has even learned to love his austere Cambrian world.

It is possible that Barrett has come to detest the society and world from which he was exiled. This explanation is suggested by the novel-length version of Barrett's story, an ironic tale of political betrayal. When he expanded the novella to a thin novel for Doubleday, Silverberg chose to describe Barrett's political career in an extrapolated late-twentieth-century America, in order to provide reasons for Barrett's exile to Hawksbill. The expanded version of the story envisages the society that grew out of a 1984 coup that eliminated contemporary democracy in favor of an authoritarian regime run by a small committee of the intellectual elite and calls itself "syndicalist capitalism." In the Orwellian novel of political intrigue that results, Barrett becomes involved in idealistic opposition to the government and is betrayed by Jack Bernstein, a turncoat fellow dissident who becomes a member of the secret police.

In contrast to the novella, the longer version of *Hawksbill Station* (though paying homage to Orwell's 1984) is disappointing. Dividing the novel's focus between two different settings tends to diffuse the forceful impact achieved by the novella. Moreover, the political conflicts of the novel are rather predictable. As a study of political betrayal, *Hawksbill Station* seems a routine imitation of Orwell or the dramas of Arthur Miller.

However, *Hawksbill Station* shares thematic concerns with the novels that followed rapidly in this breakthrough period, especially in their pessimistic view of social progress and political action. Underlying the early formula adventure novels was a comforting belief in social and scientific progress, as

Silverberg tended in some respects to support the positive faith in the victory of humanity through modern technology that is central to the Campbell and Heinlein visions of forties science fiction. That comforting faith in the future also seems to underpin *To Open the Sky*, despite its satirical elements. Just as the romantic initiatives and the social criticism of the sixties were changing older attitudes and raising new questions, Silverberg's novels now begin to show increasing realism and scepticism about society and the human condition.

Thorns, an ambitious novel for Ballantine, presents a satirical attack on media exploitation of the public obsession with novelty, especially through television, a subject Silverberg had touched on, but not effectively, in *Regan's Planet*. Satire on media exploitation was less conventional in 1966–67 than it is today, however. At the center of *Thorns* is the plan of Duncan Chalk, a dictatorial and sadistic media baron, to make a spectacle out of the staged romance of two human beings who have become “freaks” in the eyes of the public: these are Lona Kelvin, the subject of a genetic experiment through which she has become the mother of a hundred children, though remaining a virgin; and Minner Burris, an astronaut altered into a grotesque figure with tentacles by experiments of alien scientists on a planet he has visited. (As the author himself has noted, the motif of unfeeling aliens tampering with humanity, much like Nazi scientists in concentration camps, is obsessive in Silverberg's work.)

Although Lona and Burris have become public curiosities, and their scripted romance attracts the attention of millions, Chalk wants more than ratings points. Silverberg depicts Chalk as a kind of caricature monster, a gross psychological vampire who not only exploits the anguish of others for entertainment value, but also takes pleasure in it, through “psychic cannibalism” to use a phrase Claeson takes from Silverberg himself (RS 16, 33). His first line is “pain is instructive” (*Thorns* 9). Living a life of luxury, surrounded by fawning and malicious sycophants, Chalk becomes a larger-than-life symbol of the promoters of tabloid journalism and mawkish, scandal-mongering television talk shows. Later in the novel, the caricature of Chalk is developed through metaphor. After an audience with Aoudad, his fellow conspirator, Chalk closes his eyes and imagines himself swimming in the ocean, perhaps as a whale or shark:

He blew a great spouting geyser to celebrate his triumph. Then he plunged, sounding joyously, seeking the depths, and in moments his whiteness vanished into a realm where light was not free to enter. (*Thorns* 43)

The image suggests Chalk's love of power and a subhuman ferocity characteristic of ocean beasts. In general, as part of his increasing technical skill, Silverberg attempts to create a texture in *Thorns* that is rich in suggestiveness. Although the novel is an intelligently conceived satirical performance,

it fails to achieve its aims effectively. This is due to the imperfect dramatization of the relationship between Burris and Lona.

After creating sympathy for them as victims, not only for their past misfortunes but also for their manipulated romance, which arouses voracious public interest, Silverberg allows them to fall in love, after being subjected to enforced separation. They confront Chalk at the end, and their emotions of disgust (which appear to issue in psychic emanations) apparently destroy Chalk by causing a heart attack. Thereupon they decide to abandon earth and return to the planet that was the scene of Burris's disfiguration.

Quite aside from the bizarre melodramatic death of Chalk, described in language that evokes demonology and Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*, the novel suffers from an inadequate handling of the sympathetic relationship between Burris and Lona. Their love, which supposedly mitigates their suffering and humiliation, remains an abstraction rather than an experience realized in dramatic terms. Despite Silverberg's intentions, neither the novel's satirical themes nor its emotional drama achieves the impact desired.

If its aims alone are considered, *Thorns* may seem a strong work. Clareson rated it thus: conceding that it "achieves no satisfactory resolution," he asserted that it was Silverberg's "fullest exploration of the redemptive power of pain," at least in fiction describing a naturalistic world unredeemed by religious faith or responsible social action (RS 37-38). Unfortunately, the pain suffered by Lona and Burris does not redeem anyone else, and it is unclear whether it has redemptive force for them.

If *Thorns* is only partially successful, it remains superior to *To Live Again* (1969), another major effort of 1967 (SBTC 33). This novel offers an attempt at social comedy based on the postulate that psyches can be imprinted on electronic tapes and transferred from one body to another, or even programmed into another person's psyche—a speculation about "virtual reality" that seems at present merely fanciful. In essence, this is a device whereby one can possess another's soul through electronic transfer. Unfortunately, the technology permitting such alterations is not credibly described.

This weakness would be tolerable, if the narrative contained sympathetic or interesting characters. However, the conflict concerns a power struggle between a Greek-American tycoon, John Roditis, who seems to be morally repulsive, and the Kaufmanns, an elegant family of financiers and merchant princes. Unfortunately, the Kaufmanns do not seem less ruthless than Roditis, merely more stylish. Although Mark Kaufmann and his daughter Risa scheme to use the imprinting technique to control the psyche of Paul Kaufmann, an amoral uncle who has controlled the Kaufmann empire, their effort produces a web of intrigue. Eventually Risa gains control over the psyche of Roditis, who dies unexpectedly, and uses his knowledge to increase the Kaufmann wealth. However, she becomes coarsened in the process. As none of the characters is particularly likeable, this outcome changes little. Even read as satire, *To Live Again* is weak both as science fiction and

as social realism. Nevertheless, a few years after writing it, Silverberg claimed that it "surpassed anything I had done on complexity of plot and development of social situation" (SBTC 33-34). Others have not agreed with this judgment.

In *The Man in the Maze*, Silverberg reduced the cast and turned away from social realism to return to a treatment of the isolated self. This time the protagonist is another physically maimed starman, Dick Muller, who is confined to a labyrinth or maze in the ruined city of Lemnos on a distant planet to prevent him from encountering other humans. Again, thanks to tampering alien scientists, Muller has been altered to become a projecting telepath, that is, a telepath who sends his thoughts and emotions abroad to the minds of ordinary people. However, no one can bear the force of his raw emotions.

The plot in this novel is rather restricted and necessarily almost claustrophobic. It concerns the attempts of a Machiavellian administrator, Boardman, to persuade Muller to leave the labyrinth to lead a new expedition to visit aliens. Muller resists Boardman's offer, although his need for human contact compels him to confide in Neil Rawlings, Boardman's young assistant. Surprisingly, Muller concludes that, in some measure, he may deserve his unhappy condition, since egotism and a desire for glory motivated him to become an astronaut. After the conflict of wills between Boardman and Muller continues for a while, mysterious aliens serve as a *deus ex machina* and liberate Muller from the maze. With newfound moral wisdom, Muller rejects Boardman's invitation irrevocably, seeing it as another egoistic venture; but he also declines to seek revenge on Boardman. Instead Muller is happy to return to the maze "because he loved mankind," as Rawlings explains in the concluding section (MITM 192).

Although *The Man in the Maze* creates a fine metaphor for the state of the isolated psyche, or more simply, the human condition, it is a rather static work with an exasperating ending. Clareson correctly found the novel's resolution sentimental and a weakening of its effect (RS 38-39). He credits one source of the novel as Silverberg's discovery of "the dilemma of man's tortured consciousness trapped within itself in a world seemingly without meaning for the individual" (RS 39). At any rate, despite Silverberg's substitution of capricious aliens for old-fashioned demons, *The Man in the Maze* attempts to explore the evil of egotism and alienation directly.

A more successful novel is *The Masks of Time*, which may be seen as a climax of the arduous process of self-transformation that Silverberg was undergoing as his explorations and experiments were reshaping his vision as a novelist. Combining science fiction and setting with social realism, *The Masks of Time* shows a nearly flawless mastery of subject and technique, without the weaknesses of Silverberg's earlier attempts at serious novels.

Set in a weary and jaded 1999 world that is awaiting the new millennium with anxiety, *The Masks of Time* depicts the social and individual responses

to the arrival of Vornan-19, a handsome time traveler from a thousand years in the future. For some, Vornan represents the fulfillment of longings for a new messiah, providing news of a wonderful future; for others this "stranger in a strange land" becomes a latter-day prophet or social commentator; and for some he fulfills both functions. Like many honest travelers, Vornan-19 expresses candid surprise at current customs and morals, perhaps reminding knowledgeable readers of Heinlein's Valentine Michael Smith in *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1962)—an intertextual parallel of which Silverberg was no doubt mindful. Both Smith and Vornan display something of the naive wonder expressed by the outsider toward conventional ideas and behavior that are taken for granted in highly organized societies. Their literary precursors include the pretended author of Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*, Swift's Gulliver, and much earlier, Sir Thomas More's Raphael Hythloday in *Utopia*. In fact, Vornan plays a similar role to Smith in his assessment of twentieth-century society, as both embody what Aldiss has called the "Candid archetype" (TYS 326). Though Vornan strolls through much of the novel as a bemused visitor who does not intend to set up a religion, he preaches a gospel of liberation from guilt and sexual inhibitions, while questioning the pretenses of modern art and architecture and the rationality of current business practices. To some extent, Vornan offers a romanticized utopian message similar to that of the sixties counterculture, as promoted in the film *Woodstock* (1970), but without the music and sentimentality.

However, Vornan turns out to be a dubious prophet and an amoral messianic figure. As seen by the novel's reliable narrator, Leo Garfield, a historian and a member of a government team assigned to observe and monitor Vornan, the visiting prophet rejects emotional involvement with humanity. His rhetoric is accompanied by casual acts of sexual dalliance, but he is capricious and easily bored. His involvement in the marriage of one of Garfield's graduate students produces tragedy: as an experiment in bi-sexualism, Vornan interferes in the marriage by seducing the husband; but unable to accept the resulting guilt, the husband then commits suicide.

However, remaining unrepentant, Vornan continues to experiment with human behavior; he accepts the public role of messianic teacher after an appearance on television makes him popular. Thereupon Vornan proclaims a gospel of peace, sexual harmony, and good will, although he offers little advice on how to make it reality. Vornan's exultation in his fame apparently leads to his death—after giving his standard sermon to a crowd of five million on the beach at Rio, Vornan goes down to meet the people, and is evidently torn to pieces, like Dionysius in ancient Greek legends.

As Garfield notes, "No trace of Vornan was ever discovered" (MOT 250), giving rise to a new mythology about the vanished messiah figure. Uncertain legends follow Vornan's death: even Garfield wonders if the government had provided protection for Vornan and spirited him away to allow him to return to his own time. However, Garfield prefers a tragic denouement that gives Vornan more stature: "We have written the proper climax for the

myth. When a young god comes among us, we slay him. Now he surely is dismembered Osiris and murdered Tammuz and lamented Baldur" (MOT 251).

Garfield's final reflections suggest the somber closing statements of the chorus in a Greek tragedy. Although Vornan is not a humanized tragic hero inviting the reader's identification, it is tempting to see him as a tragic embodiment of a Dionysian god who inaugurates the new millennium. As a literature major at Columbia, Silverberg had no doubt become acquainted not only with Sir James Frazer's study of fertility myths in *The Golden Bough*, but also with visionary scenarios of the future envisioned by Friedrich Nietzsche and William Butler Yeats, in which an incarnation or return of the spirit of Dionysius replaces Christ as the dominating divine force in the next era (perhaps two thousand years in Yeats's personal myth).⁵ In addition, Silverberg's awareness of the mythology of dying gods was no doubt enlarged by his work on non-fiction anthropological books. Hence *The Masks of Time*, a title that suggests both the masks of Greek tragedy and the Yeatsian cycles of history, is a work enriched by analogues in literature and myth.

However, Vornan, who tries to play the role of messianic prophet, proves to be only a false messiah, embodying the formless hopes of an anxious public. His career becomes an ironic revision of the messianic performance of Heinlein's Valentine Michael Smith; indeed, indirectly perhaps, Silverberg has given us in his study of Vornan a realistic and ironic parody of the romantic and superhuman adventures of Smith. As Letson has commented, *The Masks of Time* is one of Silverberg's "ironic and satiric treatments of the salvation theme" (RSMT 27).

Nevertheless, this novel is a brilliant and nearly flawless performance, showing how far Silverberg had advanced after leaving what Aldiss calls the "old pulp patterns" behind (TYS 342). Silverberg was now ready to enter a new phase when his fiction would win not only his self-respect, but also that of his colleagues and critics (SBTC 35). Ironically, this was happening at a time when some of his fellow writers were considering Silverberg to be a burned-out writer (Malzberg 1974, 69).

As Letson has perceptively observed regarding Silverberg's work from 1961-75, his "major fiction" always concerns "variation on the more powerful themes of anxiety" and his fictional forms have been developed to deal with the "exposition and resolution of anxiety" (RSMT 16). It was Silverberg's growing awareness of existential anxiety and alienation from society and a naturalistic universe that compelled many of his novelistic experiments during this period of transition and growth. If *The Man in the Maze* explored personal anxiety and moral weakness, for instance, *The Masks of Time* deals with a public world of media and governments obsessed by society's anxiety.

During this period Silverberg was not merely adapting the techniques and metaphors of modernist literature that depicted anxiety and alienation to his science fiction efforts; he was, in fact, incorporating the metaphors and tech-

nical devices of modernist literature into his novels because of a personal need to deal with the themes of Eliot, Yeats, Kafka, and Conrad. A similar growth in artistry and maturity of theme was appearing in his short fiction.

If Silverberg's progress as a novelist during the sixties showed a remarkable improvement in vision and technical mastery, his short fiction in this decade also gave evidence of growing technical mastery and intellectual interest. The growth seems less dramatic here since some of the early short stories had been of high quality. During the early and middle sixties, Silverberg published collections of shorter fiction, but at first most were gathered from his backlog of magazine stories of the fifties. Indeed, in *Needle in a Timestack* (1966) and *Dimension Thirteen* (1969), Silverberg placed stories from the fifties alongside stories from the sixties without lowering the quality of the collections, and he continued this practice into the seventies with *The Cube Root of Uncertainty* (1970) and *Moonferns and Starsongs* (1971). The vitality of the fifties stories is demonstrated by the enduring presence of some in a major collection, *World of a Thousand Colors* (1982). Nevertheless, some of the sixties short stories give indications of Silverberg's growth in vision and narrative skill.

One of the first, "To See the Invisible Man" (1962), has been credited by Silverberg with inaugurating his commitment to quality (SBTC 35). This study of social isolation for Pohl's *Galaxy* offers the story of a man in a future society who is punished by being socially ostracized for a year. The "invisible" man as a first-person narrator is particularly effective here, since the experience of an invisibility that "was strictly metaphorical" (TBORS 49) is rendered in a grimly personal manner. The irony of the punishment is that in the narrator's case, it is appropriate to his crime: he had repeatedly failed to "unburden myself for my fellow man" (TBORS 49). During his year as a pariah, Silverberg's protagonist learns through a succession of initiation encounters what it is to be rejected by fellow humans.

There is a sense of release when his punishment ends. As a mark of his changed status he is able to converse with his judges and enjoy a drink with them. However, the liberating resolution is somewhat ironic: his sense of loneliness has been so intense that when he sees another miserable "invisible man" being ignored, the narrator breaks the law by speaking to the outcast. His lofty indifference to humanity has been replaced by empathy; he has rejoined the human community. With the abstract quality of an ironic fable, "To See the Invisible Man" resembles classic tales of Poe and Hawthorne. Undoubtedly it will continue to rank among Silverberg's best.

Another memorable story from this period is "The Sixth Palace" (1965), an exercise in pure irony that anticipates the mature work. This little fable describes the efforts of a rogue, Bolzano, to steal a closely guarded treasure from "the sixth palace" on the planet of "red Valzar." The treasure, however, is guarded by a robot that is programmed to question those who

intrude in an effort to find the treasure. Bolzano knows that many have perished trying to gain the prize, but he remains fascinated by the challenge. Cleverly outwitting the robot by answering its questions with nonsense, he gains entry into the inner sanctum of the sixth palace and obtains the treasure; but while leaving, he carelessly forgets himself and answers a question rationally, thereby bringing on his death. Although this fable offers an ironic view of success, the tale may also be taken as a satire on excessive cleverness and rationality. Silverberg has commented that his story contains overtones of Zen Buddhism, but we may note that it also resembles the sardonic vision of much absurdist fiction and drama, such as *Waiting for Godot* and the drama of Ionesco (TBORS 63).

Another important short story from the period is "Flies" (1967), a seminal work for Harlan Ellison's *Dangerous Visions*, a landmark anthology of the sixties and an American parallel to the English "new wave," presented as a deliberate exercise in challenging the "taboos" or restrictions of pulp magazine science fiction. "Flies" complements both *Thorns* and *The Man in the Maze* in theme: describing the return to earth of Richard Henry Cassiday, a starman restored to health by aliens after a disaster in space, it is another study of isolation.

Like Muller in *The Man in the Maze*, Cassiday has been altered psychologically in such a way as to make him an outcast. Unfortunately, Cassiday has also been rendered unfeeling and is lacking in moral awareness. When he comes back to earth, he visits his three ex-wives and performs acts of cruelty that are calculated to cause them immense psychological suffering. His alienation from humanity makes him a sadist and another "psychological vampire," like Duncan Chalk of *Thorns*. To underscore the point, Silverberg invokes Gloucester's lines from *King Lear* about alien gods who kill for "their sport," treating humans "as flies to wanton boys." Appalled at the monster they have created, however, the experimenting aliens recall Cassiday to their world and operate on his nervous system in order to restore his conscience. Now he must experience the anguish of those he has made to suffer. Once again, the mysterious aliens play the role of tormenting demons. The narrative ends with Cassiday "nailed to his cross" of vicarious suffering, a condition that anticipates the emotional situation of David Selig in *Dying Inside*.

Not only does "Flies" foreshadow later stories and novels, but it also demonstrates Silverberg's willingness to experiment with narrative technique. Presented as a series of scenes, the narrative is unified by brief descriptive lines in the form of terse messages resembling printouts. Such loosening of traditional narrative protocols marks a movement toward the disjunctive narratives and anti-narratives favored by "new wave" writers and "experimental" writers in the late sixties and early seventies.⁶

However, Silverberg's ultimate experiment with the story of psychological sadism is "Passengers" (1968), which transforms the old nightmare of de-

monic possession into a science fiction horror tale. In a short narrative that draws on the fears of aliens in Golden Age stories, like Robert Heinlein's paranoid cold war fantasy, *The Puppet Masters* (1950), Silverberg describes a world of 1987 where people become the psychological prisoners of beings who take possession of their minds and wills. These "passengers" feed on people's minds and emotions for a time and then withdraw, leaving their human hosts scarred psychologically. Even if the theme of alien or demonic possession is an old one, Silverberg treats the matter as vividly as in the best Gothic predecessors. Such stories emphasize the importance that pain and psychological suffering had assumed in Silverberg's fiction.

In addition, Silverberg published other strong shorter works during this transitional period. No survey of Silverberg's second period would be complete without at least a passing reference to such impressively ironic tales of alienation as "Neighbor" (1964), "To the Dark Star" (1968), and "Halfway House" (1966). "Halfway House" in particular is a treatment of the burdens of responsibility worthy of extended discussion. However, the most important feature of this work in shorter forms is plain: without the need to adapt constantly to formulas, Silverberg was now able to concentrate more intensely on refining his craft and developing an intense vision of existential anxiety, the exploration of his own "heart of darkness." In short fiction, as in novels, Silverberg was transforming his work from that of a journeyman professional to that of an imaginative writer of stature.

Searching for Jerusalem: Authentic and Spurious Quests for Transcendence, 1969–1974

During his first major period, Silverberg published most of the work that was nominated for awards and established his reputation as one of science fiction's master stylists and skilled novelists. With one exception (*Downward to the Earth*), the works from this period that appear to have aroused the most respect and gained the greatest critical attention were in the darkly ironic and satiric mode: *The World Inside* (1970), *Dying Inside* (1972), the novella, "Born with the Dead" (1974), and the "new wave" collection of stories, *Unfamiliar Territory* (1973). Indeed in these works, he was continuing the work begun in his breakthrough novels of 1966–67, and attempting to define the human condition as portrayed in much modernist literature. This modernist vision has been succinctly summarized by the distinguished scholar Wayne Booth when he concludes that "many of our major novelists and poets have portrayed a world in which all honest thinkers admit that we are a forlorn waste, lost in a cosmos indifferent to our ends, rootless, groundless, unaided by any rationally defensible code, expressing at best our irrational values in existential protest" (TCWK 38). Significantly, Booth's description uses phrases that evoke well-known and classic analyses of the modern human condition by the philosopher William Barrett (*Irrational Man*, 1958) and the Christian existentialist novelist Walker Percy (*Lost in the Cosmos*, 1983), writers probably known to Silverberg.¹

Several insightful critics have perceived this basis for Silverberg's mature work. As we have seen, Letson has argued that Silverberg's serious fiction arises from existential anxiety over "human finitude" (RSMT 17); similarly, Brian Stableford has identified the theme of Silverberg's mature fiction as

overcoming "situations of extreme alienation" (MOSF 1, 37). Too frequently, the popular and misleading view of Silverberg's first major period assumes that his mature novels were mainly satiric and ironic variations on *Dying Inside*. On occasion, Silverberg himself has inadvertently given support to this error by comments in interviews that suggest that his published fiction in 1968-76 was chiefly an exploration of modernist irony (DM 263).

However, as Robert Hunt was the first to point out, several of Silverberg's mature novels from this period are focused on an affirmative religious quest, although they contain "religious feeling without a true religion" (BSF 64-77). Instead the quest for religious revelation begins in existential anxiety and proceeds on a somewhat romantic quest for transcendence, reflecting in some respect the romanticism of the *Zeitgeist* of the late sixties. As Aldiss has put it, such novels as *Nightwings* (1969) are about "rebirth and metamorphosis, alienation and its cure" (TYS 341). Silverberg himself has also acknowledged that science fiction itself had a romantic and transcendent appeal for him. He confesses in the 1977 Introduction to *Galactic Dreamers* that "long before I ever heard of the word 'transcendental,' I was seeking and finding an analogue of transcendental experience in the pages of magazines with awful names like *Thrilling Wonder Stories*" (xi). If science fiction originally provided an experience of transcendence for Silverberg, this fact may support the audacious and controversial claim of Alexei and Cory Panshin that American science fiction—following in the path of nineteenth-century Romantic poetry from Blake on—has been largely a twentieth-century genre on a "quest for transcendence" or a vision of human nature and destiny that would replace the fading traditional vision of institutional religions (WBTH 188).

However that may be, Silverberg's novels describing the quest for transcendence have protagonists seeking to discover this elusive goal in journeys of penitence; in various kinds of visionary states, induced by drugs or other forces; and in psychological communion or meeting of minds (mainly by telepathic means) resembling the mystical "I-Thou" relationship celebrated by Martin Buber.² Nevertheless, not all the works by Silverberg that may be described as concerned with religious quest have affirmative tones or resolutions. Indeed, some may be designated as satiric or ironic treatments of the search for salvation: these are in fact "demonic" or spurious "inversions" of authentic quests, to borrow Northrop Frye's apt description (AOC 147-150).

Nor should the term "religious" be interpreted too narrowly. Here it is helpful to draw on the work of Paul Tillich, a theologian well known in the sixties, in order to use his famous and inclusive conception of religion as a person's "ultimate concern."³ Thus we will find unifying religious themes in many works Silverberg produced during this period; some of the novels deal with positive versions of the quest for transcendence, while others treat false quests from an ironic perspective. Both groups provide comments on

the “natural evil” of finitude and anxiety, and the moral evil of human behavior, traditional concerns of the theologian (Macquarrie 253–267).

Nightwings is one of four major novels from this period that are deeply concerned with affirmative religious quests. *Nightwings* (1969) follows a road of penitence to a mystical transformation of the self. *Downward to the Earth* (1970) describes the journey of a protagonist in search of moral and spiritual renewal who finds fulfillment through a mystical recovery of awareness of the natural basis of life. *A Time of Changes* (1971) is narrated by a hero who seeks fulfillment, though with tragic results, through human communion created by using drug-enhanced visionary moments. *Son of Man* (1971), the least successful work, abandons novelistic convention in search of a visionary awareness that will transform mundane reality. Clearly, in his novels of religious search, Silverberg was unwilling to rest quietly with only one solution for humanity’s eternal questions.

Of the four, *Nightwings* is the most striking experiment in style and conception. It presents a story that follows a classic pattern of completed spiritual quest, and employs both science fiction motifs and traditional symbols of rebirth. However, the novel, although set in the remote future, embraces social concerns as well as personal themes of penitence and purgation: humanity is indicted for historical crimes against a different species and for damaging the earth’s ecological system, as well as for specific acts of egotism and malice depicted in the novel. All this is presented through a narrator, Tomis the Watcher, who begins as a passive but suffering observer of human crimes, reminiscent of the Tiresias figure in T. S. Eliot’s 1922 classic poem, “The Wasteland.” Like Eliot’s Tiresias, Tomis plays a hopeless role in a moral wasteland; but after punishment (or judgment) is imposed on the earth by the invasion of aliens, he takes the pilgrim road, arriving finally at a spiritually reborn Jerusalem, called Jorslem, to undergo his own purification. Although the narrative begins in a tone of helpless resignation, it proceeds to describe a process of apocalyptic transformation of society, and Tomis’s attainment of purgation and triumphant spiritual renewal.

The significance of *Nightwings* for Silverberg’s major period has been recognized: Aldiss has described its vision as “Stapledonian” in its criticism of human egotism (TYS 341), and Clareson has given measured praise for its mastery of language (RS 48–50). A probing analysis by Colin Manlove has dissected the story’s exploration of moral and religious themes (SFTE 100–120) and praised its “lyricism” (120). Although Manlove has offered a helpful study of the characters and moral issues of *Nightwings*, its overall pattern and allegorical design have not been clearly perceived, and questions remain about the novel’s implications.

As Manlove has noted, some of the novel’s charm is due to its setting, a wasted future earth thirty-four thousand years hence, when technology seems to be in decline, and humanity, paying the penalty for a misguided

use of its resources, has returned to a rather medieval condition of city-states. People belong to guilds, as in the High Middle Ages, and only those who have the security of guild membership are not rooted to particular cities. The narrator, a member of the guild of Watchers (an ancient order that seems almost to have forgotten its reason for existence), is one of those who lead a wandering and rootless existence. In such a neo-medieval atmosphere, references to the ancient city of "Roum" with its seven hills evoke the atmosphere of the unsettled centuries following the fall of the Roman empire.

Appropriately, Silverberg's prose has a serene and elegiac quality, as well as an unforced and restrained poetic tone:

Roum is a city built on seven hills. They say it was a capital of man in one of the earlier cycles. I did not know of that, for my guild was Watching, not Remembering; but yet as I had my first glimpse of Roum, coming upon it from the south at twilight, I could see that in former days it must have been of great significance. Even now it was a mighty city of many thousands of souls. (*Nightwings* 9)

Thus, in a few sentences, Silverberg creates an atmosphere when rapid transmission of information has been replaced by a regression to oral history and legend. The Watcher's mood of passionless acceptance is established by restraint and understatement ("in former days it must have been of great significance").

The narrator's tone of resigned acceptance creates a surprisingly elegiac quality for the description of a scene that we would expect to be dramatic, or even melodramatic—the sudden and apocalyptic arrival of the alien starships, which will punish the people of earth for their ancient sins and bring a new order:

When I had perceived them in my watching they had appeared black against the infinite blackness, but now they burned with the radiance of suns. A stream of bright, hard, jewel-like globes bedecked the sky; they were ranged side by side, stretching from east to west in a continuous band, filling all the celestial arch, and as they erupted simultaneously into being it seemed to me that I heard the crash and throb of an invisible symphony heralding the arrival of the conquerors of Earth. (*Nightwings* 56)

One of the fine dramatic moments treated in many science fiction stories is the arrival of alien starships on an unsuspecting earth; but the Watcher's lyric description here is entirely different from the mood of Wells's *The War of the Worlds*. There, the aliens invade a busy earth; here they come like the Last Judgment on a moral and physical wasteland.

When we look more closely at the passage above, we see that it shows a sense of observed detail (comparable to the same scene as it has been envisaged by numerous illustrators), but it succeeds through an effective use

of poetic images. "Jewel-like globes," "the celestial arch," and "the crash and throb of an invisible symphony" are metaphors that suggest the world of high Romantic poetry. Such imagery complements the stately tone and diction that are just archaic enough to distance the event from our present. In some respects, this prose style may remind the reader, particularly in its tone and slightly archaic diction, of Gene Wolfe's mature manner in his masterful tetralogy, *The Book of the New Sun* (1980–82). Clareson has noted a strong similarity between Silverberg's style here and that of the Wolfe epic (RS 49). In both Wolfe and *Nightwings*, there is a stylistic paradox at work: an imaginative use of archaism helps to create the atmosphere, not of the remote past, but of a distant future in technological decline. In short, *Nightwings* is a stylistic triumph for Silverberg, though he has not chosen to return to this manner in later works. Perhaps only in the development of a stylized neo-Elizabethan prose for *Lord of Darkness* has he sustained a stylistic experiment of such length.

Not only in style but also in management of plot *Nightwings* demonstrates Silverberg's maturity. The action is simplified and credible (if we accept the rationale for the visionary experience of Part 3), and this simplicity of design, combined with the rich range of reference created by the prose, opens the way for the wider range of religious allegory. Each of the three parts of the novel describes a self-contained action and ends with a reversal or series of reversals. The reversals of Part 1 and Part 2 are ironic, with the disappearance of Avluela and the arrival of the aliens ending Part 1, and the murder of the prince by Olmayne's cuckolded husband ending Part 2. There is some irony in the reversals at the end of Part 3 also, in the moments of transformation and renewal at Jorslem; but the irony here is essentially the poetic irony that accompanies affirmative endings.

In part 1, the narrator seems a hopeless and resigned observer of life in an impoverished future earth haunted by the memory of past grandeurs, where hope has been blighted by decline. The only happiness felt by the Watcher, who will later receive the name of Tomis, comes from his stoic resignation and the pleasure he feels in traveling with his curious friend Gormon and the flier, Avluela, the lovely child woman for whom Tomis feels a deep but sexless love. Both companions are supposed to be humans of genetically altered types, with special powers. While Gormon, the "changeling," is a grotesque fellow, almost a comic figure except for his formidable talents, Avluela is a charming young woman, whose innocence and beauty are symbolized by her ability to fly. Though Gormon and Avluela are vividly drawn characters with roles to play, we find it easy to see them also as symbolic figures, with Avluela representing an underdeveloped psyche or soul for the Watcher, untested by experience, and Gormon his latent talent or manhood. While these figures appear to be merely curious traveling companions, the Watcher is doomed to a state of passive acceptance.

The Watcher's vocation is also symbolic, since he has been trained to look at the heavens. Evidently, he may be seen as a poetic visionary who has forgotten the goal of vision: appropriately enough, the Watcher's ostensible job is watch the skies for alien invasion, but neither he nor anyone else believes in the possibility of the invasion any longer. The Watcher's chief fulfillment comes from observing Avluela's flights after sunset, but characteristically, he despairs of being able to fly himself.

The novel is concerned with Tomis's recovery of vision and attainment of the power of flight; but in order to achieve these ends, he must be awakened from his ennui, shocked into new awareness, separated from Avluela, and forced to become vicariously involved again in human passion. Manlove has noted (SFTE 112) that Tomis undergoes changes in the novel, and he comes close to identifying Tomis with humanity, but this identification is too sweeping. Tomis is symbolic of the poetic visionary or seeker, or the imagination of humanity; but if he were humanity itself, he would have no vocation at the novel's conclusion. At any rate, the theme of *Nightwings* is the regeneration of Tomis, who may be a symbolic Everyman, but who does not represent the majority of humanity in the novel's world.

The twists and turns of the plot show Tomis's progress on his pilgrimage. In Part 1, the trio of Tomis, Gormon, and Avluela arrive at a decadent Roun, the descendant of the historic Rome and a center of secular power, which is now ruled by an arrogant prince whose arbitrary cruelty is an emblem of human history and its inhumanity. The prince's cruelty is displayed when he seizes Avluela and forces her to be his lover, an act of hubris that seems to precipitate apocalyptic punishment by alien invasion. Gormon, outraged by the violation of Avluela, is revealed as an advance guard or scout for the alien invaders, and the invasion comes quickly after the prince's outrageous crime. When the invaders arrive, Gormon implements his own mode of justice by blinding the prince and flying off with the rescued Avluela, leaving the grieving Tomis as a choral figure to describe the destruction of a decadent terrestrial civilization. The arrival of the aliens creates an apocalyptic mood that dominates the remaining section.

In Part 2, the Watcher resumes his wandering, accompanying a pilgrim who turns out to be the fallen and blinded prince in exile. The two travel through strange regions like a latter-day Oedipus and Tiresias. Painfully, the prince learns humility, and the Watcher gains a greater sense of compassion. However, unlike the exiled Oedipus, Prince Enric never attains authentic wisdom and compassion for others. Eventually they reach "Perris," where the Watcher gravitates to the guild of the Rememberers, and learns the history of earth's past.

The chief crimes of recent human history are described in a lengthy section relating the Watcher's research in the archives of the Rememberers. Two major acts of arrogance taint humanity's past, both committed during the "Second Cycle" of high technological development, when earth was the leading civilization in the galaxy. The first transgression was a series of crimes

against other species, specifically less civilized and articulate ones: some of these less fortunate beings, including those whose descendants invade the earth at the end of Part 1, were captured and imprisoned in camps that were essentially terrestrial zoos. Such crimes combined elements of racism and genocide.

The second major stain on human history involved crimes against nature and ecology: hoping to alter the weather for the better, humans began an experiment that went on over several centuries, resulting in the melting of the polar ice caps and the submerging of the North and South American continents, and causing genetic changes. The chaos following these environmental disasters ushered in the earth's decline and began the "Third Cycle," which is the era of the novel's present.

Since these two enormous crimes of human hubris created both the motive for the invasion of earth and the opportunity (by weakening earth's power), Tomis is able to discern a poetic justice in the conquest of his world by the aliens, although most people have considered it a capricious act of fate. Not only is he suffused with guilt over the sins of the human past, but the Watcher also feels a need to accept responsibility for moral errors caused by the arrogance of his dominant species. This new awareness and guilt lead to his involvement in a sordid and tragic human drama—the prince's foolish affair with the imperious Olmayne, wife of the head of the guild of Rememberers, a liaison that results in the prince's murder.

Hence the Perris section of the novel ends appropriately on a penitential note with Tomis leaving the city for Jorslem as a pilgrim, accompanied by the willful Olmayne in place of the prince, her lover, who was slain by her husband. (When captured at the scene of the murder, Olmayne was wearing a torn scarlet robe, a descriptive touch that is obviously symbolic—suggesting the "Scarlet Whore of Babylon" in the Apocalypse, the final book of the Bible.)

If the plot is interpreted by traditional Christian iconography, then Perris is the city of worldly lust and vanity, and Roum is the city of arrogance and secular power. After traveling through both symbolic earthly cities, Tomis is now ready to begin a pilgrimage to Jorslem, the future version of Jerusalem, still the city of holiness and spiritual revelation as well as the earthly analogue to the City of God in Heaven.

Thus Tomis, who had sought to accept responsibility for the prince's past sins—on a symbolic level, those of earth and humanity in the past—now finds himself accompanying a fallen woman who represents earthly vanity in his journey to the holy city. Prince Enric had been a symbolic figure, representing past human arrogance or hubris. Tomis's acceptance of both companions and his efforts to assume their guilt helps to open the way to his own redemption.

Part 3, "The Road to Jorslem," brings the novel to a conclusion that is satisfying both in human terms and as spiritual allegory. As Manlove notes, this pilgrimage "is a journey from secular to sacred" (SFTE 113). In Jor-

slem, both Olmayne and Tomis undergo a ritual of penitence and cleansing, climaxed by their submersion in the waters of healing—an obvious rite of baptism, although its powers to rejuvenate the penitent physically are given a scientific rationale. Not being truly penitent, Olmayne suffers the punishment of regression to childhood and loss of identity. Tomis, however, enters a new state of renewed youth, which symbolizes the concept of redemption in biblical thought.

On the road to Jorslem, Tomis is morally tested on several occasions. The most important experience of the pilgrimage, however, is one that involves mysticism rather than ethical action. Early in the Afreek part of the journey, Tomis uses a “starstone” to enter into a visionary trance and finds himself confronting a new level of experience: his selfhood is temporarily transcended, and he attains a temporary union with the divine at the heart of the universe. Silverberg’s attempts to describe this experience are at first direct and abstract statements: “I knew only that when I let myself be drawn into the stone’s effect, I was engulfed by something far larger than myself, that I was in direct communion with the matrix of the universe. Call it communion with the Will” (*Nightwings* 144).

The novel emphasizes such epiphanies throughout its concluding section. It should be noted that the common religion of this future earth has been a simple expression of piety, one in which God or the divine spirit is referred to by the title “the Will.” This title seems to preserve the Judeo-Christian idea of God as a person or a personality, while divorcing the concept from metaphors of social hierarchy (God as king, etc.) or from sexual or gender considerations (God as male or father; God as female or mother). In the starstone trance, Tomis confronts a mystical experience of God, or the Divine, as a universal power to which humans pay homage or reverence, and whose presence brings cleansing and renewal. When Tomis describes his experiences in more detail, his account becomes more vivid and less abstract, especially in regard to the purification of the moment of self-transcendence:

And slipped down through the layers of my life, through my youth and middle years, my wanderings, my old loves, my torments, my joys, my troubled later years, my treasons, my insufficiencies, my griefs, my imperfections.

And freed myself of myself. And shed my selfness. And merged. And became one of thousands of Pilgrims, not merely Olmayne nearby, but others trekking the mountains of Hind and the sands of Arba, Pilgrims at their devotions in Ais and Palash and Stralya, Pilgrims moving toward Jorslem on the journey that some complete in months, some in years, and some never at all. And shared with all of them the instant of submergence in the Will. And saw in the darkness a deep purple glow on the horizon—which grew in intensity until it became an all encompassing red brilliance. And went into it, though unworthy, unclean, flesh-trapped, accepting fully the communion offered and wishing no other state of being than this divorce from self.

And was purified.

And awakened alone. (*Nightwings* 145)

This description emphasizes not only the transcendence of the Will, but the narrator's sense of communion with his fellow pilgrims. As in many religious and mystical traditions, Silverberg's portrayals of religious experience tend to emphasize both a vertical and a horizontal dimension; that is, God, under whatever name, is perceived as a power above and over humanity, but transcendence also occurs in the presence of other humans with whom there is a high level of communion. (This second dimension of transcendental experience appears frequently in *A Time of Changes*.)

In discussing the starstone, Tomis and Olmayne reach the subject of loneliness and alienation, which Olmayne, surprisingly enough, describes as "the greatest of human curses, that is the confinement of each individual soul within a single body" (*Nightwings* 144). Such a comment is somewhat unexpected here. Yet Silverberg's use of Olmayne as a voice of spiritual insight may be defended as a stroke of artistry. The cure for this greatest of human curses is offered in mystical communion with others.

In Jorslem, the holy city, Tomis encounters the flyer, Avluela, his lost love from Part 1. Each confesses love for the other, and the promise of a lasting reunion is given after Tomis undergoes the rite of renewal. When the elaborate baptismal ceremony takes place, Tomis experiences a purgation of his soul as well as his body; and after submersion in the waters, which remind him at one point of the fluid in the womb, he awakens to a new life as a young man.

Providing Tomis with the opportunity to give his spiritual renewal to all humanity, Silverberg ends the novel after the ritual. Tomis is reunited with Avluela and given a new vocation as a member of the guild of Redeemers, a group of apostles who assume the task of going outward from Jorslem to provide spiritual and physical help to those in need (much like conventional religious orders). In addition, Tomis, Avluela, and other members of the guild of Redeemers create a new communion through use of a combination of the starstones and the Watcher's old machinery for scanning the heavens. This communion represents the establishment of a religious community, thereby concluding the story on an affirmative note. However, the symbolism of the novel's pattern of redemption deserves further elucidation.

Another look shows us that Olmayne, the unrepentant "scarlet woman," may represent the stained or older soul of Tomis; in Jungian terms, she is the symbolic figure of experience and evil called the "dark anima."⁴ Tomis's reunion with Avluela symbolizes a recovery of his early innocence of soul; Avluela, with her slender body and delicate wings—reminiscent of butterflies, of course—is clearly a figure suggesting the psyche, or in Jungian terms the purified "anima." Tomis's final marriage and union with Avluela represents a union of self and soul, or the ego's acquisition of sanctity, or the condition that W. B. Yeats called "radical innocence," and which orthodox Christians call grace.⁵ Immersion in waters of renewal is an obvious baptismal rite, for like baptism this ritual involves a symbolic death and

rebirth through the medium of water, a symbol of life and fertility; similarly, Tomis's recovery of physical youth represents his attainment of spiritual innocence and fertility (or creativity).

Although the religious symbolism follows obvious Judeo-Christian traditions, it is presented as part of the novel's religion of the Divine Will. Silverberg imagines this new universal religion as a logical successor to the obsolete religions associated with Jorslem—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—which, Silverberg's narrator explains, passed into history because they no longer found support in a body of adherents. Nevertheless, as part of his preparation for renewal, Tomis does visit some of the shrines of the old religions, notably the Wailing Wall of Judaism and the supposed site of Christ's sepulcher. Thus Silverberg connects the mystical events of Part 3 with actual religious tradition.

The final scenes after Tomis's renewal also follow time-honored religious archetypes (readers familiar with English literature may think of the concluding sections of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, or of the closing cantos of Book 1 of Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*). Tomis's induction into a religious community, with its communal worship providing an experience of unity with other redeemed souls, and a sense of union with the universe, represents the ideal toward which Judaism and Christianity strive; but Silverberg's version is purged of doctrinal and sectarian overtones. At the close, Tomis describes himself as being able to join Avluela imaginatively in her flights by means of the modified starstone equipment, and its telepathic powers. Moreover, Avluela is now able to fly during the day as well as at night, for Tomis's presence helps her overcome the weaknesses that made her wings inoperative in the daylight. Thus spiritual wholeness is associated with the attainment of "nightwings." The closing harmonies symbolize unities attained by Tomis and Avluela: the unity of body and soul, masculine and feminine principles, self and soul, and the light and the dark sides of the self, as well as other contraries that might be cited.

Thus Silverberg's novel ends in a tone of triumph. It is fair to say that Silverberg has succeeded in embodying his visionary conclusion in memorable images. As an added note of chiliastic hope, Tomis and other characters prophesy that there will be a "new earth," at least in a moral and political sense when the guild of Redeemers has done its work. Not only will humanity be transformed, but the alien conquerors will themselves be "conquered by love," Tomis predicts, suggesting a parallel with apostolic Christianity, which set out to win over the Roman conquerors of its day with love.

Whether or not *Nightwings* is Silverberg's most affirmative novel, it certainly concludes in a spirit of hope. Of course, its religious themes depend on an uneasy compromise between spiritual affirmation and science, since Tomis's renewal and higher vision involve quasi-scientific processes. It also seems to require abandonment of human desires and ambition.

Does the salvation of mankind require waiting until the distant future and alien invasion? *Nightwings* suggests an affirmative, but to ask such a question is to take its science fiction metaphors literally. To explore the problem of the quest for salvation from other perspectives, Silverberg wrote *Downward to the Earth* and *A Time of Changes*. Both novels have received attention as works on religious themes, and both offer solutions in the quest for transcendence and liberation from the isolated self. Though both contain writing of a high quality, there are important differences. Ironically, *Downward to the Earth* is probably the more enduring work, although it was *A Time of Changes* that received the coveted Nebula Award for 1971. (*Downward* was nominated for 1970, but its chances were hurt because Silverberg's *Tower of Glass* was also nominated for that year, thereby dividing the vote.)

Over the years, however, the fame of *Downward to the Earth* has increased, while *A Time of Changes* has not worn so well. Aldiss, for instance, judges *Downward* to be "more effective than *Nightwings*" as a study of "guilt, punishment, and expiation." David Pringle chose *Downward* as Silverberg's representative on his highly personal list of the best novels in the genre (*Science Fiction: The 100 Best Novels* 147–148). *Downward* continues to attract interest in its treatment of religious search, as is evinced by a fairly recent essay in *Extrapolation* (Winter 1994) by Joseph Dudley comparing the novel with Philip José Farmer's *Night of Light* as an exercise in "Transformational SF Religions."⁶ Although Dudley's approach to the novel is influenced more by the critical theory of Michel Foucault than by studies of religious experience, his essay at least focuses on *Downward's* central themes.

Another reason for the novel's perennial interest has been its Conradian analogues. One genesis of *Downward to the Earth* for Silverberg was a trip to Africa, as he has revealed in a retrospective introduction. Other influences included his memories of reading Rudyard Kipling and Joseph Conrad, which were somehow combined in his sense of the sheer physical ambience of the continent, as he recalled, remembering his feeling of struggle in the composition of the novel (DTTE x–xi). Of course, Silverberg made sure that the Conradian influence would not be overlooked by naming an important character Kurtz, after the Faustian tragic hero of *Heart of Darkness*. As a result, scholars have found the parallels with Conrad a helpful way into the novel, as the excellent brief analysis by Claeson shows (RS 51–53), and as is illustrated by the fine essay "Silverberg and Conrad: Explorers of Inner Darkness" by Rose Sallberg Kam, which appeared many years ago in *Extrapolation* (December 1975).

The influence of Kipling should not be overlooked, nor should Silverberg's references to the sheer physical impact of Africa. It should be remembered that after many stories celebrating British imperialism in India (including some in *The Jungle Book*), Kipling produced the novel, *Kim* (1901), in which he attempted to describe the heart and soul of India.

Gundersen is more of a Kiplingesque former imperialist than a skeptical Marlow from Conrad's fiction, and his journey upcountry is in part a search for understanding of the land where he has been a successful manager without understanding the native peoples. Gundersen's quest encompasses more than a review of past errors; it is also a search for the parts of the self he left behind in his intense effort to succeed. Moreover, Gundersen, though a physically active man, has lost contact with the physical encounters with life and nature, and, as Silverberg indicates, it was the sheer overpowering physical effect of Africa that had stimulated his imagination.

Perhaps more significant than literary precursors was the impact of Africa as a physical entity on Silverberg's imagination. First, Belzabor is a very solidly conceived planet, modeled on Africa, and its atmosphere—a few enclaves of civilization surrounded by bush or jungle and haunted by legends of a "mist country"—seems to be much like the experience of Europeans encountering East or Central Africa. Hence *Downward to the Earth*, with its insistence on the often intractable and brute physical reality of Belzabor, is in this respect a considerable advance in Silverberg's fiction (only in the Nidor books had the setting of an alien culture been as significant). Even the language of the novel calls attention to the powerful physical presence of the planet. Indeed, *Downward to the Earth* is unusual even among Silverberg's works of the third period in its density of physical detail.

Gundersen's return to the scene of his former successes and failures is a successful journey into the self, much like that of Marlow in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, as both Clareson and Kam have argued. Kam's analysis of the novel stresses so many parallels with Conrad's short novel that it may be better here to comment on the differences between the two works. In Conrad's tale, for instance, Marlow is making a voyage of initiation when he is an untested youth; his is a journey into deeper experience, the knowledge that comes from observing Kurtz's surrender to his primitive impulses and his longing to be free of "civilized" restraints. Conrad's Kurtz, in fact, is a Faustian figure who surrenders to lust for power and domination and to the desire for extreme sexual gratification. He becomes a charismatic and godlike dictator of the natives he rules, leads them on raids to take ivory from neighboring villages, and encourages all kinds of acts of blood lust. Finally, Kurtz takes a splendidly uninhibited native woman as a mistress. As a tragic exemplar of the human lust for freedom, power, and self-gratification, Kurtz is viewed with shock and horror by Conrad's Marlow; but Marlow comes to recognize, implicitly at least, that Kurtz embodies a drive or group of drives at the hearts of all people. Hence, Kurtz becomes a symbol of a part of Marlow's own inner self, or of the Freudian well of energy that is labeled the "id," as well as the Jungian figure called "the shadow," as some critics, most notably Albert Guerard, Jr., have suggested (CTN 33-48).⁷ After his fateful meeting with Kurtz, and his acceptance of Kurtz as a symbol of his own inner drives (just as the jungle symbolizes his unconscious self), Marlow

discovers a mature wisdom that lies behind some of the apparently casual statements made in the course of his narrative. For instance, work and self-discipline provide a protection against the unrestrained impulses of the unconscious.

If Marlow's journey to the "heart of darkness" provides him with a provisional wisdom that allows him to maintain civilized and humane values, then Silverberg's Gundersen is a man who has attained such knowledge early in his ten-year stint as an administrator on Belzagor. What Silverberg's Gundersen, the analogue to Conrad's Marlow, must learn in his return to Belzagor is the way to the "heart of light," a journey of initiation that Conrad's Marlow perhaps never made. This journey must be a pilgrimage downward and inward into a densely physical world, before paradoxically, it can become a journey upward. Thus while there are significant parallels between Silverberg's novel and its Conradian predecessor, the differences between the two are also important to note.

To begin with, Gundersen is a mature, responsible man who must overcome several failings in his past. For one thing, he had tended to treat the natives of Belzagor like highly intelligent animals, and despite his best efforts to be humane, he had always felt a good deal of contempt for them. These natives belong to two sentient species, one being the nildoror, resembling highly evolved and intelligent elephants, and the other, the sulidoror, who are apelike bipedal creatures. The massive physical forms of the nildoror, as well as their trunks, render them slightly ridiculous to humans, and their lack of a written language and a high technology makes it easier for terrestrials to feel a sense of superiority.

Yet Gundersen, returning after eight years, finds himself much closer in sympathy to the nildoror than to the human tourists with whom he is obliged to travel for much of the journey. Despite Gundersen's attempt to be charitable toward the tourists, the reader tends to share his views after exposure to their conversation about the planet and the nildoror.

In Gundersen's past, there are two major moral lapses for which he seeks to atone in his self-imposed pilgrimage. The first seems relatively innocuous to everyone but Gundersen: early in his tour of duty on Belzagor, he had joined his colleague, Jeff Kurtz, and his assistant in a self-indulgent and orgiastic drug experience in the jungle near Kurtz's station. The drug here is the snake venom—evoking ironic and poetic parallels to the images of the serpent as tempter and seducer that permeate Judeo-Christian literature—that the terrestrials extract for export to earth as a medicinal aid. The effect of the drug is simple: Gundersen had felt transported out of his isolated self and for a time had experienced the illusion that he inhabited the body of a nildoror, in an event that represented liberation from his loneliness. Although no harm had been done by surrender to this drug-induced ecstasy, Gundersen remembers the incident as a fall from his high expectations of himself and a lapse into self-indulgence. However, this violation of his code

was a minor one compared to his later profanation of the nildoror religious code, for which he feels an enormous guilt. Although Silverberg's Kurtz had not been directly involved in this transgression, his presence haunts Gundersen's journey upcountry, so it is important here to define his role in the novel.

Silverberg's Kurtz functions as a kind of foil for Gundersen, for Kurtz is another instance of a terrestrial imperialist who abused his position as overlord, not only exploiting the nildoror, but seducing them away from their cultural beliefs. Kurtz's degradation of the nildoror is never dramatized for the reader, save for the scene of the drug-induced orgy. It consisted primarily of giving the snake venom to the nildoror and encouraging them to profane their religion, especially the rebirth ritual. Thus, although Silverberg's Kurtz is presented credibly as an attractive rebel, a Lucifer in the process of falling (in Gundersen's phrase), he never quite becomes a sinister figure with the stature of Conrad's Kurtz. Moreover, when Gundersen meets him again, Silverberg's Kurtz has been punished so greatly that he has become a pitiable figure.

Tormented by guilt, Kurtz has undergone the nildoror rebirth ceremony, only to be transformed into a hideously misshapen creature, angelic around the head and shoulders but bestial from the chest down. Meeting Kurtz in this grotesque condition, Gundersen recognizes that his bodily form symbolizes the deterioration of his inner nature.

However, it is Gundersen's redemption, not Kurtz's degradation, that is the center of the novel, just as Marlow is finally the protagonist of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Gundersen's pilgrimage to the mist country contains many fateful encounters. On the journey he meets various terrestrials, mostly former imperialists who have in some manner succumbed to Belzagor and its temptations. These characters represent moral failure, or foolish responses to the planet's challenges, as well as tragic lessons for Gundersen. In addition to Kurtz, there is the shallow Van Beneker, Gundersen's former subordinate and now a tourist guide; Seena, Gundersen's former mistress, and Kurtz's wife, who tries to live a life of neo-paganism on Belzagor, in order to mask her disenchantment; two unnamed terrestrials whose bodies are bloated by giant parasites and who represent, probably, a mindless surrender to the nature of Belzagor; and finally, an intelligent former colleague of Gundersen's, Cedric Cullen, who is dying of cancer and is so overwhelmed by a sense of futility that he refuses to be shipped to earth, where advanced medical science might arrange a remission. Cullen is a particularly important minor character. His transgression was to discover the dark side of nildoror mysteries, their ritual of repentance—without undergoing the initiation into the redemptive rite of nildoror religion, the rebirth ceremony.

All these characters play a role in Gundersen's pilgrimage, which is not only a journey into acceptance of his past with its guilts, but an immersion

into the physical and more primitive world of Belzagor. Thus, his quest embodies the metaphor of the book's title, suggested by a passage from Ecclesiastes: he journeys metaphorically "downward" to an encounter with a supposedly "lower" species and their highly physical nature; also, he journeys "downward" into an acceptance of the darker or more Dionysian side of himself. Paradoxically, however, his physical journey, although it ends in a cave, is a journey upward, from the coastal plain to the rain forest to the heights and snows of the mist country, and finally to the holy mountain of rebirth with its cave that serves both as tomb and womb of the beings transmuted by rebirth.

One of the revelations that comes to Gundersen near the end of his quest is that the two species of Belzagor are really one, since they undergo lives first as nildoror and then as sulidoror. This identity of the two species is a symbolic statement of several ideas: first, that all sentient life is essentially of one being or nature; and second, that a release from the burden of the solitary self may be attained by a new existence in the form of another sentient species. Clearly, the sulidoror are intended to represent the Apollonian or cerebral type of life, just as the nildoror are associated with the Dionysian and animal level of existence; but this theme is subordinated to Gundersen's final discovery.

What Gundersen experiences when he undergoes the rebirth ritual is an ecstatic and numinous vision of the wholeness and unity of all life, a moment of transcendence that is undoubtedly the central core of experience in the novel. A similar scene at the end of *Nightwings* had provided an epiphany that clarified the entire book. In Gundersen's epiphany, Silverberg's style rises to impressive heights. The visionary tone of this experience (virtually all of chapter 16) is achieved by a shift to the present tense, and by a deft command of poetic imagery:

The fragments seek one another. They solemnly circle one another. They dance. They unite. They take on the form of Edmund Gundersen, but this new Gundersen glows like pure transparent glass. He is glistening, a transparent man through whom the light of the great sun at the core of the universe passes without resistance. A spectrum spreads forth from his chest. The brilliance of his body illuminates the galaxies. (DTTE 172)

In Gundersen's vision, the metaphor of being "transparent" is crucial: when purified and renewed a sentient being allows the light of the "core of the Universe" to shine through; the renewed nildoror and sulidoror also accomplish this, but by contrast the souls of the terrestrials Gundersen perceives in his visionary state seem to him to be mostly "blind and silent." Gundersen cannot communicate with any of them except the flawed spirit of the tragic Kurtz, which seems to contain just enough radiance to imply the possibility of redemption.

In the final chapter, the tone changes to a more restrained note of social purpose, as Gundersen pledges to his sulidor or mentor that he will return to civilization to take the gospel of rebirth to others. One significant feature of this chapter is Silverberg's choice of New Testament allusions. Clearly, Silverberg is attempting to translate the familiar gospel concept of a second birth or being "born again" and the New Testament promises of "all things being made new" into fresh religious terms, liberated from the dogmatic and doctrinal tenets of orthodox Judaism or Christianity. In this respect, *Downward to the Earth* carries on the spirit of *Nightwings*, although, as we have noted, *Downward to the Earth* places a heavier emphasis on the physical and Dionysian aspects of existence, and stresses the importance of transcending the limitations of the rational consciousness.

On the whole, *Downward to the Earth* remains a fine novel. It frequently approaches the high level of *Nightwings*, and in one respect, it seems to be superior. Gundersen, the quest hero of *Downward to the Earth*, has some real sins to atone for, whereas the saintly Tomis of *Nightwings* is guilty of only minor faults, such as lack of hope and lapses of charity, and yet he feels obliged to suffer for humanity's sins. In *Downward* also, the affirmation of the images of the physical world has its own transcendent value, much as in the mystical theology of Martin Buber.⁸

The theme of religious search that began in *Nightwings* is continued, in a different mode, in *A Time of Changes* (1971), a novel often paired with *Downward to the Earth*. While *Downward to the Earth* was merely a nominee for the Hugo and Nebula awards, *A Time of Changes* was honored by receiving the Nebula for 1971. This distinction does not ensure the superiority of *A Time of Changes*, however. In fact, the success of *A Time of Changes* may have owed much to cultural fashions of the time, when sympathy for mind-expanding drugs was more widespread. *A Time of Changes* now seems less impressive than *Nightwings* or *Downward to the Earth*, just as the luster of many award-winning films dims in later years, when social concerns of the moment have faded.

With a title suggested by a Bob Dylan song, *A Time of Changes* draws on the same matrix of ideas as in *Downward*, but it reveals more aesthetic and philosophical weaknesses. An autobiographical narrative of an exiled prince on the planet of Velada Borthan, *Changes* presents Silverberg's now familiar theme of the need to overcome the alienation and loneliness of the solitary self through psychic communion. This time the means of achieving a transcendent "I/Thou" encounter, as celebrated in the mystical theology of Martin Buber, is a powerful drug that enables the recipient to enter the mind of another person telepathically, while opening his own mind to the other.⁹

In presenting this theme, however, Silverberg's conception of a transcendent personal communion gets intertwined with incest and eroticism; or, at

any rate, Silverberg's hero complicates his longing for spiritual kinship with romantic feeling for his "bondsister." (As a later chapter shows, a thwarted and confused incestuous feeling also afflicts David Selig in *Dying Inside*, Silverberg's most poignant novel about the isolated self.) To put the matter in the traditional terms of Christian theology, eros or romantic love is compounded with the longing for agape or disinterested charitable love.

Although current disenchantment with drugs weakens the novel's impact, a greater weakness is the predictable pattern of its plot. To be sure, Silverberg makes Darival's society on Borthan a repressive and unattractive one: people are forbidden to use the first person pronoun in dialogue concerning personal relationships. Denied the opportunity to exercise political power, Darival flees from his brother's antagonism much as Moses ran away from Egypt and the wrath of the pharaoh into the land of Midian. After acquiring maturity, success, and a new identity, Darival then (again, as Moses found the vision of God in the burning bush) discovers his vision-inducing drug and experiments with establishing close personal relationships. Eventually he returns to his homeland, hoping secretly to spread the gospel of the drug and its power to release personal feeling.

However, he commits the ultimate transgression by introducing the drug to his "bondsister" Halum, whom he has secretly loved, and as a result, he learns of her own romantic feeling for him. Since an erotic relationship with one's "bondsister" is taboo, it naturally becomes the source of suppressed erotic feeling, and Darival commits a kind of psychological incest in blending his thoughts and emotions with hers. (Some form of incest appears to be one of the classic crimes of the romantic rebel.) Halum's act of rebellion proves too much for her conventional conscience, and, racked by guilt, she commits suicide. Later, Darival is betrayed and escapes to the desert where he writes his narrative as a testament of protest against the obtuseness of the world that persecutes him. As the story ends, Darival is about to be captured and martyred for his revolt against tradition. It should be remembered that Darival is a tragic figure, and the novel does not make a clear endorsement of drug-induced mysticism.

Although *A Time of Changes* is a well-crafted novel, its weaknesses make it a flawed performance compared to *Nightwings* and *Downward*. There are vivid scenes, as when Darival describes his adventures with his father hunting the "hornfowl" (an owl-like bird of prey that is a symbol of untamed nature on the planet); but the overall effect of the book is diffuse and muted. A prophet who preaches the gospel of love and personal communion in Darival's way is not exactly bringing a new message, except for the dubious use of drugs, and a predictable story with familiar romantic conventions (even committing the tabooed sin of incest) does not help. Unlike Moses, Darival is a tragic deliverer who fails in his mission; he is, in Aldiss's words, "a flawed but ultimately messianic figure" (TYS 343). Aside from Darival, most of the characters appear to be conventional types, and Halum, the heroine whom

Darival loves and destroys, is a shadowy figure. Aldiss, however, finds the conflict of the novel to be realistically depicted and a relevant parallel to contemporary social conflicts (TYS 343). However, the most glaring defect of the novel is yet to be mentioned: at those times when the drug-induced telepathic communion takes place, the writing fails to attain the visionary power of similar moments in *Nightwings* and *Downward to the Earth*. Claerson also offers a similar negative judgment by asserting that "the final vision of Darival's is not an effective affirmation" (RS 59).

Not content with his achievements in *Nightwings* and *Downward*, Silverberg attempted to make a more daring visionary religious statement in 1971. However, this was also one of his most disappointing failures. Narrated in the present tense in a tone relentlessly ecstatic and vatic, *Son of Man* abandons most of the usual conventions of fiction, providing neither realistic characters nor a coherent quest adventure plot. Although the work takes the form of a quest romance in a visionary landscape, and aspires to a high level of poetic intensity, it provides only a series of fragmentary and sometimes not very interesting episodes.

The science fiction prototypes of the novel include David Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus* (1920) and Olaf Stapledon's *The Star Maker* (1937), as Claerson has noted (RS 59). Behind these important imaginative efforts lie not only H. G. Wells and H. Rider Haggard, but also the great tradition of the Romantic poets with their quest narratives like S. T. Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," William Blake's prophetic works, Keats's *Endymion*, and perhaps the most obvious precursor, Shelley's long visionary poems like *Alastor*.¹⁰ At first glance, indeed, *Son of Man* is likely to strike the reader as the kind of romantic effort that a young Shelley or Keats might have produced had he lived in the sixties and written science fiction. It is probably wise to concede that at best *Son of Man* remains a confusing and incoherent work. In fact, only Brian Stableford, among Silverberg's critics, seems to express much enthusiasm for the novel (MOSF 40). Nevertheless, the question of what Silverberg was attempting in the novel is important to a study of Silverberg's canon.

Son of Man takes its name from the Gospel title that Jesus frequently applied to himself. Since Jesus also defined himself as the Son of God and the Gospels tend to insist both on the humanity of Jesus and his divinity, the title actually assumes connotations of a messianic divinity incarnate in human flesh. According to many interpretations (both orthodox and heretical) of the New Testament, Jesus embodies a mystical identity of God and man, and one purpose of his mission on earth was to bring the promise of a richer and fuller life for humanity—in fact, to give humanity the power to become "sons of God." For orthodox Christians, this promise is to be fulfilled only in heaven after death or after the apocalyptic Second Coming of Christ; but even orthodox theologians have hesitated to suggest that

humanity itself can attain a kind of secondary divinity at last. However, radical heterodox Christian visionaries like Blake have envisioned the possibility that humanity could actualize its potential divinity without waiting for the Second Coming or by bringing on the Second Coming through human action.¹¹ Similarly, such visionaries as Stapledon and David Lindsay have tried to envision more expansive possibilities for humanity.

In contrast with its predecessors, Silverberg's *Son of Man* is chaotic and disappointing. The quest takes Silverberg's searcher, Clay, through numerous visionary encounters and initiations, and the design of the novel is vaguely apocalyptic (as long quotations from the Gospels of Matthew and Mark at the novel's beginning and end indicate). However, Silverberg's book fails to make use of a clearly formulated mythology that would provide a satisfying narrative structure. Moreover, Silverberg abandons the conventions of quest fiction, as Stapledon and Lindsay did not, which places an enormous burden on his narrative skills. *Son of Man* proceeds from one series of surrealistic encounters to another, without ever generating the narrative momentum that Lindsay, for instance, achieves in *A Voyage to Arcturus*. Thus Silverberg's seeker, Clay, a masculine figure, is transported to another realm of existence; undergoes various expansions of consciousness, such as becoming androgynous; experiences sexual intercourse from the point of view of a woman; and lives through other experiences that enlarge awareness of human potential. At the end, Clay is presented with the knowledge that the descendants of humanity, the "sons of men," will be godlike creatures, although they will take a variety of new biological forms.

Despite Silverberg's literary talents, *Son of Man* fails to achieve a coherent fictional statement. Moreover, Silverberg's use of the first person and an exalted, visionary tone is difficult to sustain in a performance of this length. Nevertheless, Silverberg's failure in *Son of Man* is an ambitious one: the work represents the mood of a romantic era in American cultural history, when liberation from the rigidities of the past was accelerating, and prodigious reforms of society and consciousness seemed possible.

The novels discussed thus far in this chapter have sought to present visionary and affirmative religious statements and have described moments of numinous epiphany that give a pattern to the narrative, although *Son of Man* tends to be merely a succession of visionary fragments. There is a dark side to the religious quest as well, as the ubiquitous presence of hypocrisy, bigotry, fanaticism, and "holy wars" all attest. As an enlightened man of liberal humanitarian views and a member of a minority that has experienced persecution and suffering, Silverberg is well aware of the dark and perverse direction that the desire for transcendence often takes. Two of the deepest roots of religious fanaticism are the fear of death, which lies behind the hunger for some form of immortality, and the desire for absolute certainty in metaphysical matters, which is also connected with the desire to feel su-

terior to the uninitiated, who remain outside a particular community of belief. Silverberg treats the effect of these desires in an impressive novel, *The Book of Skulls* (1972), and in the three novellas in *Born with the Dead*, which contain some of his finest writing.

In *The Book of Skulls*, the longing for immortality serves as the motivation for a perverse and ironic quest. The theme of the human yearning to conquer death had preoccupied Silverberg before: notably in some sixties short stories and in the bizarre *To Live Again*. Moreover, in the early novel *Recalled to Life* (1962), Silverberg had portrayed the social effects of the discovery of a process to resurrect the newly deceased, and this novel was sufficiently important for him to revise it for publication in 1972. As we have noted, the revised *Recalled to Life* treats the desire to cheat death affirmatively, while hinting at the existence of a future state of life after death.¹² In short, Silverberg's fascination with this theme is fairly obvious.

However, *The Book of Skulls* offers a strong contrast to *Recalled to Life*. Here the supposed existence of a mysterious "Book of Skulls," which is believed to hold the key to immortality, encourages four college students to set off on a journey across the United States to Arizona where a secret monastic order that is living by the book is believed to reside. The four students are young males of superior intelligence from an unnamed Eastern school, presumably an Ivy League university, and at first their quest resembles the daring and bizarre experiments of the sixties undertaken by college dropouts—such as creating guerrilla theater, setting up communes, planning a revolution, or developing a new religion. Their journey ends ironically with betrayal, the death of two of the students, and the total surrender of the other two to a destructive cult. Without exaggeration, their quest is described by one character as "a dark version of Pascal's gamble, an existentialist all-or-nothing trip," and the book abounds in ironic parodies of religious symbolism (BOS 5). If the quest of the saint is for sanctity and transcendence, then their quest is a negative version of the saint's quest, a journey to find a physical immortality reserved for an elite few.

The demonic symbolism, or ironic parody of affirmative religious myth, is extensive. As Ned, the would-be poet, points out, the group of four constitutes a Jungian mandala, but this quartet becomes a sinister mandala because their agreement with the secret order requires that two must die in order that the other two may gain immortal life (an ironic parody of the Christian conception of the Atonement).¹³ The "Book of Skulls" (a name perhaps suggested by the Tibetan *Book of the Dead*), which supposedly contains the arcane knowledge needed for immortality, is a sinister or occult book of scriptures and hence a demonic parody of the Bible (and sacred books), much as H. P. Lovecraft's mysterious *Necronomicon* was a nonexistent occult work that became an ironic parody of other sacred books. As the title of the "Book of Skulls" indicates, its real reward is death, rather than spiritual life, the reward offered by authentic sacred books.

The quartet of seekers is a well-defined group of elitists. It includes the Jewish Eli Steinfeld, a philosophical skeptic with a genius for manipulating people; Ned, a seemingly weak homosexual poet, who nevertheless has a talent for exploiting the vulnerabilities of others; Oliver, a handsome and athletic Midwestern lad, apparently an All-American boy, but without awareness of his own complexities; and Timothy, a scion of Eastern wealth and a cheerful hedonist who regards the entire trip as a lark (and who, despite his arrogance, may be the most healthy member of the group). Moreover, in a striking display of narrative art, Silverberg tells the story through the first person voices of the four protagonists. Each of the students is credibly characterized through his own narrative voice, but the alternating narrators heighten the novel's irony. In addition, since the four students are fairly literate and since Eli and Ned have both read widely, there are rich uses of literary allusion, which are usually given an ironic turn. Finally, though Silverberg does not portray any character who represents a clearly desirable moral alternative to these four, a moral perspective is provided because the student questers condemn themselves through their own words.

Aside from the pattern of a negative quest, the external action of the novel is rather slight until the final third of the book. Then, nudged by Eli's manipulation, Ned, the homosexual poet, is able to seduce Oliver, the supposedly normal Midwestern boy, and get Oliver to surrender to his own latent homosexuality. Later in Arizona, Oliver's guilt causes him to commit suicide, while Eli, spurred by hatred, murders Timothy when the latter is attempting to return to the outside world. Appropriately enough, Eli commits his act with a steel skull; ironically, the murder satisfies the requirements of entry into the order, just as Oliver's death allows Ned admission. These deaths become instances of human sacrifice, the ultimate symbolic action of a demonic cult.

It is perhaps no coincidence that Eli, whose discovery of the "Book of Skulls" motivated the quest in the first place, is given the name of the corrupt priest in the Old Testament who has been immortalized by his association with Samuel, the brilliant judge of Israel. Eli also has the last passage of the book, and there he describes himself, anticipating his years of immortality as a member of the order while his past is already slipping from memory. Silverberg leaves the question of whether the "Keepers of the Skulls" really possess the secret of immortality unresolved; but it is obvious that physical immortality on such terms is worthless because it requires spiritual death, or more specifically, a living death. At the end, Silverberg's seekers may have found the secret of physical immortality, but each is imprisoned in an isolated consciousness. Indeed this novel might well have been called *The Book of the Damned*.

All things considered, *The Book of Skulls* is a grim and brilliant performance. As a study of the evil consequences of the hunger for physical immortality, it is quite impressive. Its quartet of narrative voices and carefully

defined patterns of irony and symbolism show Silverberg at the height of his powers. Although Claresson found the novel admirable, he also found it a troubling example of the "dark side" of Silverberg's work (RS 65-66).

The three novellas in the volume called *Born with the Dead* are also impressive works; in fact, the title story is as fine as anything in the Silverberg canon. All three deal with death and humanity's "ultimate concern," or the religious desire to find either immortality or some kind of transcendence in this life. However, the themes of the three are quite different.

"Going," the earliest of the three, is the quietest in tone. Its setting is a late twenty-first-century future when medical science and drugs have extended longevity to well past a hundred years. To ease the population problem and the anxieties of the elderly, the government has established "Houses of Leavetaking," where one may prepare for death and commit suicide in a painless way. Silverberg's hero, Henry Staunt, decides at the age of 136 that he has seen enough of life on earth and applies for admission to one of the official suicide institutes. The story then describes with dry irony the shock of his elderly children and their sense of guilt because they feel that they have not loved their father enough. Disenchanted and stoical, Staunt feels that he has reached a point at which little can surprise him; as confirmation, he discovers boredom at the behavior of his relatives and the nurses and doctors at the institute. At length, he chooses to die quietly, well before he has exhausted the amusements he had planned for himself in his last days. Staunt's acceptance of death without regret, and with no particular faith in life after death, makes him a heroic figure, quite the opposite of the arrogant students of *The Book of Skulls*. In essence, "Going" suggests that actual death may be preferable to the "death-in-life" of old age.¹⁴

By contrast with the restrained tone of "Going," "Thomas the Proclaimer" reverberates with frenzied oratory and frenetic events. The story proceeds from the premise that Thomas Davison, an evangelist, has asked for a sign from God and, to his surprise, receives one: the sun "stands still" for a twenty-four-hour period, or in actuality, the earth does not rotate on its axis. As a result, there is widespread panic, increased by the fact that it is the year 2000, when millennial hopes and apocalyptic fears abound. (Silverberg had exploited this idea before in *The Masks of Time*.) As a result of the "sign from God," organized religions are struck dumb, the fundamentalists and cultists are stung into hysterical frenzy, and new cults arise in response to the emotionalism of the moment. Even a cult of scientific rationalists becomes religious. Some of the credulous are aroused to fevered incoherence of the Pentecostal sort—that is, to "speaking in tongues."

Silverberg has commented that the story's basis is "sheer fantasy" for him, since he considers a sign from God to be highly unlikely. Clearly, judging by the tragedy and chaos that result from this occurrence, it may be better for humanity if such an event never happens. As Silverberg frankly acknowl-

edges, his view of humanity and its religious emotions in this study is dark and satirical (BWTD xi).

However, the somber tone of "Born with the Dead" is remarkably different. This novella was, by Silverberg's testimony, one of the most difficult of his works to write, but it is also one of the finest jewels in his crown (BWTD xi-xii). The theme of "Born with the Dead" is the contrast between the two states of life and death: or more specifically, a rather empty everyday life in a future 1992, and the zombie-like state of "life-in-death" of "the dead," people who are frozen cryogenically and "rekindled" to life. Jorge Klein, the protagonist, finds life without his late wife Sybelle to be relentlessly boring in a world where technology has made most of the inhabited parts of the earth similar. He longs to be reunited with Sybelle, but the dead do not come back to life with the passion or obsessions of the living; rather, they have entered a state of cold detachment from the emotions and conflicts of existence. They associate only with other dead, stay most of the time in the "cold cities," towns containing their own king, and reject contact or involvement with their relatives or lovers from their former lives. Klein, however, refuses to accept the loss of Sybelle, when he sees her apparently alive again in her passionless, post-resurrection state. When a meeting is arranged between them, she rebuffs him and makes him the victim of a macabre joke (literally employing "dead-pan" irony). But he persists. At last, his obsession becomes annoying to the "dead," who have the legal right to terminate any living person who imposes on their existence too greatly. In a final strike of irony, Klein is himself killed and restored to life as a "dead," whereupon his former passion for Sybelle is chilled. After a time, however, they become platonic friends and learn to enjoy each other's companionship.

Silverberg's novella is masterful in its restraint and command of tone, and it is impressive in its portrait of two completely different states of existence. The story makes it clear that the gulf between the living and the dead appears to be impassable on ordinary terms, and once again Silverberg has treated the hope for physical immortality through advanced technology with consummate irony. Such a resurrection may not be worth having, the novella suggests; and however pointless and confused ordinary life may be, it is, according to Silverberg's mature imagination, preferable to the zombie-like existence of "the deads." "Born with the Dead" is science fiction at the highest level of art.

However, its cold beauty has its price: Silverberg has commented that "Born with the Dead," *Dying Inside*, and *The Book of Skulls* were works in which he took his kind of pure ironic vision as far as it could go; and beyond the creation of these works there was, he felt, only "silence" (BWTD xiii). For all of his intellectual awareness of the tragic nature of mortality, and the moral flaws of humanity, Silverberg could not be content to rest in a completely ironic vision of the human condition.

Not long after the completion of *Dying Inside* in 1971, and about a year before "Born with the Dead," Silverberg wrote "The Feast of St. Dionysus" for an anthology on the theme of the quest for transcendence edited by Terry Carr. Later, Silverberg recalled that "I wrote it with wondrous energy and passion," and the novella eventually won an award (Introduction to FOSD x). It is one of Silverberg's most memorable treatments of the religious themes that dominated much of his work. Not only does the novella offer tentative affirmations, but it clarifies Silverberg's mature vision in important respects.

In "The Feast of St. Dionysus" the hero, John Oxenshuer, a former astronaut, seeks release from the guilt and self-accusation resulting from the deaths of his two companions on the first Mars expedition. As both were killed by an unexpected sandstorm, Oxenshuer could not have saved them; but he feels responsible for their fate, partly because he was spared. To compound his sense of guilt, one of the two slain astronauts was Dave Vogel, a childhood friend, a companion and rival in youth, a successful rival in love, and finally his superior officer. Submerged in his friendship and admiration for Vogel have been envy and a repressed love for Claire, Vogel's wife. As Oxenshuer had no doubt unconsciously wished for Vogel's death, Oxenshuer's guilt after the event has become overwhelming.

Thus, in the early stages of the novella, it is established that Oxenshuer cannot accept his own survival. After severing the ties of civilization, Oxenshuer leaves Southern California in his car to drive into the Mojave Desert on a final penitential and self-destructive quest.

In the desert, Oxenshuer finds a mysterious city that is not on any map. Laid out in the form of a labyrinth that surrounds a central plaza and a "God-house," the city is called the "City of the Word of God"; it is inhabited by a cult who worship both Christ and Dionysius (although they insist on the spelling "Dionysus"). Oxenshuer lives among the communicants for a time and is gradually drawn into their religious community. Finally he begins to accept their drinking rituals and is persuaded to participate in the feast they hold for St. Dionysus, completely unaware that he is to be a sacrificial victim, representing the person of the god.

On the feast day, Oxenshuer becomes ceremonially drunk and engages in a wrestling match with Matt, the son of "the Speaker," the shamanistic leader of the city. During the wrestling match, Oxenshuer momentarily loses consciousness and mentally substitutes his late friend, Vogel, for his opponent, an action that somehow spurs him on to victory. Later in the "God-house," where he expects to join in the mass for St. Dionysus, Oxenshuer again loses his sense of reality and begins to hallucinate, imagining himself going back to Mars on a special mission to bury his companions' bodies and returning to marry Claire. After a dream of losing Claire in the desert, Oxenshuer has a final vision of journeying to join Claire in the city for a mystic consummation, after which presumably he will be ritually sacrificed and

eaten by the people. Thus he goes to his fate oblivious of what is happening but purged of his guilt and reconciled to both his past and his present.¹⁵

Oxenshuer's gradual surrender to the role of victim becomes mesmerizing as his memories of the past blend with the present and with moments of hallucination. Although the novella's plot follows a tragic pattern, the action has a curiously ambiguous character, and Oxenshuer's self-sacrifice has mystic overtones. Some keys to the story's meaning are provided by the shaman-priest, or leader of the "City of the Word of God," who is called simply "the Speaker," when he explains the nature of the faith and its synthesis of the worship of Christ and Dionysus. According to his exegesis, the faith conjoins opposites: Christianity and paganism, Apollonian rationalism and Dionysian emotionalism, the light and dark sides of the soul. Even Buddhism is said to be included in the faith's eclectic compound (in intention at least). The aims of the synthesis are twofold: to restore a sense of wholeness and unity to humanity and to renew religious experience constantly by direct communion with the gods.

Thus Oxenshuer is encouraged to surrender his consciousness to two experiences: first, the ecstasy of Dionysus through the ritual of wine and hallucinations, and then to the "ocean of Christ," that is, the oblivion of death and final peace in his sacrifice at the feast (as I interpret the ocean metaphor). His entry into the "ocean" of non-being is itself a surrender to the cosmos, and represents a kind of self-transcendence.

Although the Speaker's theology leads to the ritual enactment of a barbaric act of human sacrifice and cannibalism, many of his ideas have an ambiguous aura. Seldom has there been a more willing scapegoat than Oxenshuer, who finds a mystic release in his surrender to the needs of the community into which he has wandered.

In reality, Silverberg, as well as Oxenshuer, finds some of the Speaker's theology attractive. Silverberg has credited a reading of Norman O. Brown, specifically his *Love's Body*, with a strong influence on the story, and it should be noted that the Speaker's comments about the urgent need for humanity to rediscover its original unity are close enough to the quest for spiritual renewal in *Nightwings*, *Downward to the Earth*, *A Time of Changes*, and *Son of Man* to suggest that they restate a significant theme in Silverberg's own fiction (FOSD ix-x). As Robert Reilly has commented in a perceptive essay on this novella, the transcendence attained in "St. Dionysus" and other religious novels of Silverberg appears to be both attractive and destructive—an ambiguous transcendence of self (RSMT 107-119).

If "The Feast of St. Dionysus" is a fine work that treats Oxenshuer's religious quest with ambivalence, its tragedy is nevertheless affirmative enough to underscore the essential positive vision of some of Silverberg's major religious novels. At the same time, its treatment of the dark side of religious motivation and the demonic actions it produces are similar to *The Book of Skulls* and the novella in *Born with the Dead*. As we have seen,

Silverberg's religious vision is many sided, and it is clearly still in the process of development. Yet his treatment of religious themes is usually serious and profound. Although his religious quest stories and novels provide no final answers, they offer testimony to the validity of mysticism and the renewal of religious experience.

5

Riding the New Wave toward Post-Modernism: Short Fiction, 1969–1974

Silverberg's best short fiction had tended to be superior to his novels, especially in the fifties. In the sixties, Silverberg's relationship with Frederik Pohl and *Galaxy*, and his liberation from the drudgery of earning a living by hack novels allowed him the opportunity to write shorter fiction of consistently high quality. Few efforts in this period experimented with narrative technique. In the short fiction of Silverberg's third period (1969–1974), however, not only does he broaden and deepen the thematic concerns of his fiction, but he also enthusiastically embraces innovations in form—partly, as he himself confesses, from the boredom caused by mastery of the conventions of traditional narrative; and partly from an interest in the literary experimentation of the “new wave” science fiction, which encouraged him to adopt the techniques of such mainstream “fabulators” as Jorge Luis Borges, John Barth, Donald Barthelme, Robert Coover, and William H. Gass. Their innovations would later be seen as harbingers of “post-modernism.”¹

Indeed, the late sixties were a time when experiment with narrative conventions became common. This decade and the seventies saw the arrival of academic studies on the neglected subject of narrative theory, and the rise of interest in structuralism, deconstruction, and “reader response.”² Silverberg, who has always displayed a knowledgeable literary awareness, and who from the beginning wanted to raise science fiction to a higher literary level, was in part responding to the *Zeitgeist*, with its fascination with radical change. The fascination with literary experiment in science fiction was signaled by the advent of the British “new wave” and by Harlan Ellison's provocative anthology, *Dangerous Visions* (1967), the impact of which Al-

diss describes (299–308). As Brian McHale had noted, there was a post-modernist or experimental movement in science fiction in the late sixties and early seventies (McHale 68–72).

Experimentation with narrative form by such writers as Barthelme and Coover embodied a good deal more than a mere revolution in craft. Although the new fiction reflected impatience with the conventions of the modernist short story that had descended from Anton Chekhov and Joyce—who in turn had rebelled against the well-made and carefully plotted stories of Edgar Allan Poe and Guy de Maupassant—it was also a movement devoted to making serious fiction reflect the fragmented (and non-linear) appearance that reality assumed for thoughtful people in the sixties. Experimental fiction became an emblem of the “post-modern” sensibility. In a world being transformed by a revolution in electronic technology, the ease of global travel, and a wide diffusion of information, experience often seemed a collage of events defying normal notions of cause and effect. Consequently, experimental fiction writers were attempting, shielded by an ironic pose as innovators in technique, to reflect their perception of the experience that they saw.³

Usually there is a strong admixture of satire in avant-garde movements in the arts. Certainly this is present in literary efforts to shock and to break up conventional responses in experimental fiction, which, like the Theatre of the Absurd in earlier decades, assaulted intellectual dogma and social taboos. Even if the purpose of absurdist drama or fictional “fabulation” is to suggest through art the irrationality and possible meaninglessness of existence—as it certainly is in such absurdist writers as Samuel Beckett—the impulse to satirize social attitudes is still very urgent. In fact, much of the experimental fiction of Borges, Coover, Gass, Barth, and Barthelme is explicitly devoted to social and political satire, as in Barthelme’s story “City Life,” or Coover’s “Cat in the Hat for President.” Silverberg’s use of experimental technique is similarly linked to a sense of moral outrage and anguish over the political and social ills besetting Western civilization in an era that began to feel an apocalyptic mood.

In our study of the shorter fiction of this period, we shall start with the stories that employ traditional modernist forms. Then we will proceed to more innovative work, especially the two impressive collections, *Unfamiliar Territory* (1973) and *Capricorn Games* (1976), later collected as *Beyond the Safe Zone* (1986).

One major group of short works in Silverberg’s third period describes the experiences of oppressed peoples or species. Two well known stories with this focus are “Black Is Beautiful” (1970) and “Sundance” (1969), one dealing with the anger of urban blacks and the other with the anguished psyche of the Plains Indians. Somewhat related efforts are “Ishmael in Love” (1970), which attempts to give voice to the emotions of a highly

intelligent dolphin, and "Something Wild Is Loose" (1971), which enters the mind of an alien creature. "The Fangs of the Trees" (1968) is an earlier but similar tale, displaying imaginative sympathy for sentient trees, although it does not explore the consciousness of these beings. The most successful and celebrated of these stories is "Sundance," but the others mentioned above attempt to portray the experience and sentiments of non-white people and even non-human entities, thereby expanding the range of experience of Silverberg's work.⁴ In "Black Is Beautiful," Silverberg postulates a New York in the year 2000, more than three decades after the racial strife of the late sixties; the city is now an enclave governed by blacks, while whites have retreated to the suburbs. Events are seen through the point of view of James Shabazz, a seventeen-year-old African American whose mind is immersed in the militant rhetoric of the troubled sixties. When Shabazz is about to attack a white tourist, however, he is stopped by a black policeman and arrested. Freed by the intercession of Powell 43X Nissim, a political boss, Shabazz is told that the old revolutionary rhetoric is out of date. Instead, Powell 43X explains, African Americans have their own place in the power structure and are able to co-exist easily with white society. Tourists to New York are protected by the system. Disillusioned, young Shabazz goes off to write an essay on black power, vowing never to sell out to the establishment as older African Americans have done. Thus Silverberg depicts the black alienation of the sixties, only to undercut it, in an ironic reversal, by suggesting that its revolutionary rhetoric would appear exaggerated in the context of a future generation.

Although "Black Is Beautiful" is cleverly contrived, it is replete with a sense of irony. Its conclusion suggests that moral outrage and inflammatory words tend to give way to compromises and conservative social change. Silverberg's extrapolation provides a shrewd comment on the sound and fury of revolutionary excitement; unfortunately, its assessment of the human readiness to compromise high ideals is tragically accurate.

One indication of Silverberg's growing maturity as a short story writer is his ability to present the point of view of protagonists other than white males. This ability to enter into imaginative sympathy with a greater diversity of protagonists was extended to sentient animals and plants. In "Ishmael in Love," for instance, Silverberg produced an amusing, but mildly poignant, story of a sentient dolphin who falls in love with a human woman. As in Gordon R. Dickson's story, "Dolphin's Way" (1964), Silverberg's tale postulates an intelligence for dolphins equal or superior to the average human's.⁵ By contrast with Dickson's story, "Ishmael in Love" is a more subtle performance, not only mocking human pretensions but presenting the consciousness of a dolphin who is as romantic as any poet, drawing on human literary resources to express his feelings. Nevertheless, though the theme is handled with deftness and tact, a story told by a dolphin that quotes Melville hovers on the narrow line between sentimentality and parody.

In such stories, Silverberg gave imaginative life to the world of inarticulate nature. Another instance is "The Fangs of the Trees," written in 1968 and reprinted in *World of a Thousand Colors* in 1982. Narrated by a plantation manager on a colonial planet who devotes his life to growing sentient trees, this tale suggests that even vegetative life may have consciousness and feeling. However, the consciousness of the trees is implied, rather than shown from inside. Instead, the plantation manager provides the focus; his sensitivity to the world of plants and natural life is suggested by his name, Zen Holbrook (since an initiate of Zen Buddhism must be sensitive to the spirit of life in all aspects of the phenomenal world).

Holbrook regards his "juice-trees" as beings with individual personalities, and has assigned a name to each from Greco-Roman history. Thus the trees are given such names as Plato or Alcibiades, and each has a personality. Holbrook suspects that these "juice-trees" possess an awareness approaching human consciousness, although even he finds this hard to believe. Moreover, the trees have fangs, which they use for protection against predators.

Despite his sensitivity to the personalities in his orchard, Holbrook is in many respects a tough-minded realist in contrast to his romantic niece. Naomi not only communes with the trees but is sympathetic toward all nature. She wishes to pet a "kitten-sized, many-legged furry thing that was twined around an angular little shrub," but Holbrook warns her, "Rule of thumb on this planet. . . . Anything with a backbone and more than a dozen legs is probably deadly" (WTC 249). This conflict between the youthful romantic and the middle-aged realist produces the crisis.

Learning that a sector of the plantation has been infected by plant rust, Holbrook realizes that he must kill all the trees there in order to save the rest. Nevertheless, Holbrook finds this a hard duty, and his task becomes more difficult when Naomi opposes it.

However, she too is obliged to put aside her tender feelings, for Alcibiades, one of the strongest of the trees, attacks Holbrook in self-defense. Against her will, she uses her "needler" on this tree and destroys it. Holbrook's suspicion that the trees are sentient is ironically confirmed when "Alcibiades screamed" (WTC 262). Both uncle and niece share a sense of tragedy at the destruction of their arboreal friends. As the story ends, Holbrook tries to reassure himself that he has not committed murder by destroying the infected trees; for, as he protests to a consoling friend, "Fred, they were trees. Only trees. Trees, Fred, trees" (WTC 265).

This somber story reveals Silverberg's sympathy with nature, especially nature exploited for human production. "The Fangs of the Trees" may also remind us that a major theme of science fiction as well as serious fantasy is the attempt to create mythic works that restore the imaginative life that once resided in the world of nature for poets and artists, particularly Greek and Roman poets. The scientific and Cartesian philosophical revolution of the seventeenth century intensified a psychological split between humanity and

nature, reducing nature from a realm of life and magic to an inanimate world of dead matter. Insofar as science fiction is a descendant of Romanticism (via Mary Shelley, Rider Haggard, and H. G. Wells), it has sometimes attempted to heal this split by envisioning various forms of humanized or sentient nature.⁶

Because it presents this alienation of humans from nature as a tragic separation, "The Fangs of the Trees" is a fine story, one of the more underrated in Silverberg's canon. Another strong effort to create imaginative sympathy for a being beyond the reader's ordinary experience is "Something Wild Is Loose," a tale about an alien who inadvertently becomes a menace. This is by no means an original situation, for inventing a mysterious alien menace is almost as old as the genre, and the plot device of such a creature running loose among a small group of frightened humans harks back to John W. Campbell's "Who Goes There?" (1938), A. E. Van Vogt's "Black Destroyer" (1939), and Isaac Asimov's "Misbegotten Missionary" (or "Green Pieces" as Asimov later re-titled it) (1950), all stories of aliens who threaten human life in enclosed situations. However, in "Something Wild Is Loose," Silverberg shows his ability to breathe new life into conventional formulas. Moreover, Silverberg makes his Vsiir, the alien who afflicts the story's starship, into a likable creature, despite its capacity for destruction. The Vsiir is a telepathic and protean shape changer who merely wants to avoid spending too much time on the starship or being forced to reside on earth. Its frustration over the difficulty of making contact with humans creates sympathy. Entering a hospital on Long Island, it tries to enter the minds of doctors and patients. Its efforts cause havoc, for it can only find shelter in people who are asleep and dreaming. Not surprisingly, it causes nightmares and literally frightens one patient to death.

Eventually a doctor establishes a rapport with the Vsiir and persuades it to show itself to humans who can help it. With their aid, it departs for another planet; rather than destroying their enemy, the humans have merely liberated it. Silverberg's story emphasizes the need for cooperation and understanding between life forms. If animals and trees may have understandable feelings, then clearly aliens may be recognizably human in their point of view.

Perhaps the best of Silverberg's sympathetic identifications with the anguish of an oppressed race or different species is "Sundance," a powerful tribute to the repressed and frustrated emotions of a Native American remembering the tragic history of his culture. "Sundance" is one of Silverberg's most successful short stories for several reasons, but especially for its ability to depict Tom Two-Ribbons's feelings. Silverberg's protagonist, a descendant of the Lakota, feels compulsively forced to re-live the genocide of the past during his participation in an experiment that is supposed to be a "ritual extirpation of undesirable beings" on a colony planet (TBORS 230). The victims here are a bovine-like species called Eaters who are killed

with pellets dropped from helicopters in order to ready the planet for human settlement. In reality, the Eaters are not sentient, but for a time Two-Ribbons falls under the delusion that they are conscious and highly intelligent, possessing a language, history, and culture.

During this time, Two-Ribbons tries to establish communication with the Eaters and join their "community." Eventually, he turns to the central Lakota (or Sioux, to use the conventional name) religious ritual, the sundance, and tries to achieve a rapport with the Eaters through this ecstatic form of worship. Describing Two-Ribbons's surrender to the Dionysian frenzy of the dance, Silverberg uses superbly evocative imagery:

The Eaters crowd close. The scent of their bodies is fiery red to me. Their soft cries are puffs of steam. The sun is very warm; its rays are tiny jagged pings of puckered sound, close to the top of my range of hearing, plink! plink! plink! The thick grass hums to me, deep and rich, and the wind hurls points of flame along the prairie. I devour another oxygen-plant and then a third. My brothers laugh and shout. They tell me of their gods, the god of warmth, the god of food, the god of pleasure, the god of death, the god of holiness, the god of wrongness, and the others. They recite for me the names of their kings, and I hear their voices as splashes of green mold on the clean sheet of the sky. They instruct me in their holy rites. I must remember this, I tell myself, for when it is gone it will never come again. (TBORS 240)

Nevertheless, the story has a surprising reversal at the end. This hypnotic ritual provides a therapeutic release for Two-Ribbons, and he learns that such a result was precisely the aim of his human companions. For he has been recovering from a breakdown of a year and a half ago, and through treatment with "reconstruct therapy," his doctor has arranged for him to enjoy drug-inspired dreams or trances, wherein he imagines the Eaters to be sentient beings. In theory, his re-creation of his people's tragic history through the sundance and his identification with the Eaters will help to exorcise his trauma.

However, the story's ending is ambiguous, for Two Ribbons has difficulty accepting this reality: his surrender to his obsessive hallucination has been too strong. Hence, he cannot find a firm psychological footing. Each attempt to plant himself on solid ground seems to turn into an illusion that "you fall through," as the final metaphor of the story puts it. This ironic and ambiguous ending heightens the story's art; it implies that Two Ribbons's anguish is too great to be healed as neatly as his therapists wish.

As a re-creation of the tragedy of the American Indian, "Sundance" is an impressive work. An effective work of social criticism that shows a masterful command of language and metaphor, "Sundance" is one of Silverberg's masterpieces.

The earlier periods in Silverberg's career had produced short fiction memorable for satirical bite. However, Silverberg's satirical fiction reached a peak

of achievement in stories of the late sixties and early seventies. In several of his best efforts, Silverberg scored off some of his most cherished dislikes: organized religion, overpopulation and the human failure to deal with it intelligently, and modern culture's sophisticated cynicism toward myth. His collections of the late sixties and early seventies, like *Moonferns and Starsongs* (1971), are pervaded with satirical comment on these themes. A discussion of the stories in *Moonferns* illustrates this. In "After the Myths Went Home" (1969), for instance, Silverberg satirizes our society's tendency to use the imaginative achievements of preceding cultures as a kind of cultural entertainment for jaded tastes—an underlying theme also of the comic novel *Up the Line* (1969) where the centuries of Byzantine history and culture become an amusement park for time-traveling tourists.

The narrator of "After the Myths Went Home" is a historian or archaeologist in a distant future society (12,400–450); but his story is reminiscent of the cynicism of the twentieth century. Somewhat poignantly, the narrator describes a world where mythic characters such as Adam and Pan, as well as historical figures like Caesar and Winston Churchill, are brought back from the past by means of a time machine. Each character is observed with amusement for a while, and is then dismissed when his or her audience becomes bored, much as our world uses up media celebrities. The last mythic figure happens to be John F. Kennedy, who views his status as an archetypal hero with bewilderment (and a touch of amusement) when he realizes that his early death led to his identification with dying gods like Baldur. Another late visitor is the melancholy Trojan seeress, Cassandra, who, before her departure, warns the narrator that humanity needs the comfort of myths: "'You should have kept us,' Cassandra said. 'People who have no myths of their own would do well to borrow those of others, and not just as sport. Who will comfort your soul in the dark times ahead?'" (MAS 31–32). "After the Myths Went Home" uses restrained irony not only to mock the shallow sophistication of technologically advanced civilizations, but to suggest one of the primary values of cultural myths: they provide a potent source of strength enabling a people to survive the "dark times."

An even better testimony to Silverberg's satirical talents is the wickedly funny "A Happy Day in 2381," also in *Moonferns*. This story contains Silverberg's most ingenious conception of a dystopian world. Unlike many dystopias imagined by American science fiction writers, it draws more heavily on the model of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* than on George Orwell's *1984*. Huxley's dystopia, and anti-utopia, postulates a society where social tension is eliminated, or reduced to a trivial level, by two means: (1) almost immediate gratification of human wants, especially the desires for social status, food, sexual pleasure, and self-indulgent dreams; and (2) systematic exercises in programming and persuasion, in order to convince the individual that he or she lives in the best society conceivable by the human

mind. Although repression and a swift disposal of dissenters are present in Silverberg's story, its world's primary method of dealing with the social tension of overpopulation is to offer readily accessible sex without birth control.

Silverberg's trenchant satirical tale describes a typical day in the twenty-fourth-century life of Charles Mattern, a minor bureaucrat with a wife and four children living in an "Urban Monad" or "Urbmon," a gigantic steel and glass high-rise building that is a self-contained city. The global population is seventy-five billion, and there are 881,000 people in Urbmon 116 alone, a staggering mass of humanity requiring food, shelter, and the assurance that they are special in the eyes of God. However, the twenty-fourth-century world deals with this appalling situation by pretending—and trying to persuade everyone—that copulation, birth, and increasing population are splendid, fulfilling God's highest law. Every day begins with radio music piped into the Urbmon's small apartments, and a ritualized invocation of the deity blessing motherhood and fatherhood. All are enjoined to have a "happy day," a banal wish that represents Silverberg's oblique satirical comment on the obsessive modern American concern with cheerfulness and daily pleasantries.

During the "happy day" described in the story, Mattern, a "sociocomputer," takes a visiting anthropologist from Venus on a tour of the Urbmon. It becomes clear that population growth is not only encouraged, but insanely exhorted as a perverse form of worship. Procreation without restraint provides a release of psychological tension, an escape valve for feelings that would otherwise produce enormous frustration and doubtless destructive rioting. Not only is one's own wife available to another male in the grip of lust, but so is any wife on the floor—a satirical enlargement of the convenience of sex in Huxley's *Brave New World*, where "everyone belongs to everyone else."

This "happy day" ends with a tragedy when one of Mattern's fellow dwellers on Level 799 becomes irrational and encounters the iron discipline that lurks behind the facade of good cheer in this pretended utopia. The young neighbor attacks his wife, but is quickly subdued and judged antisocial. Shortly thereafter, he is fed to the "converter" chute, which destroys him and recycles his substances. For those who find overcrowding, lack of privacy, and absence of individual purpose intolerable enough to create hysteria, retribution is swift.

At the end, Mattern reflects on the young man's rebellion and his own inner discontent: he is restless enough to go "nightwalking" and find solace with another man's wife, but he realizes that he cannot allow himself to think about his dissatisfactions, or his own shaky equilibrium may be upset. His final thoughts are in conformity with the desired social attitudes: "God bless, he thinks. It has been a happy day in 2381, and now it is over" (MAS

20). Thus Silverberg's story ends on a note of supreme irony, reaffirming the satirical tone of the entire work. It is a depiction of the horrors of an overpopulated earth, and humanity's abysmal ineptitude in dealing with this problem. "A Happy Day in 2381" is a brilliant dystopian story, far surpassing, I think, its competitors on this theme. It is a small masterpiece.

Many of Silverberg's other stories have a strongly satirical bent, but the more notable are less consistently dominated by the acerbic tone that pervades "A Happy Day in 2381." In two of the stronger ones, the drama concerns characters for whom the readers feel more sympathy than they did for Charles Mattern and his fellows. "How It Was When the Past Went Away," (1969), for instance, is a long and sometimes poignant novelette in *Earth's Other Shadow* (1973) depicting a future when a number of characters are afflicted by loss of memory. This story becomes more than a speculative exercise about the loss of the past; it dramatizes the concept that identity is largely defined by memory. Hence the appeal of loss of memory: amnesia enables those who find their identity a burden to enjoy the pleasure of a flight from self and an escape from responsibility. However, the satire here is tinged with compassion.

The second fine satirical story is also about the acceptance of responsibility. "The Pleasure of Their Company" (1970) a gem in *Moonferns*, is a fable about a would-be revolutionary who is fleeing from certain death and martyrdom while attempting to rationalize his action as a courageous choice. This work offers a sardonic comment on the ease by which people can practice self-deception and build comforting illusions about self-serving conduct. A secondary theme is the absurdity of creating a simulation of Plato or Goethe for our amusement or companionship, as the protagonist does, hoping to forget his fellow rebels. "The Pleasure of Their Company" reduces to absurdity the notion that great minds could be replicated by a mechanical computer program.

These stories reveal Silverberg's extraordinary talent for satire, which reached a level of excellence during this period. In the short fiction of the next few years, however, he would display further evidence of growth by exploring experimental anti-narrative forms.

Silverberg's experimental short fiction mainly appears in two volumes published in the seventies, *Unfamiliar Territory* (1973) and *Capricorn Games* (1976). Although Silverberg produced many fine collections of shorter fiction in rapid succession in these years, including *Moonferns and Star Songs* (1971), *The Reality Trip and Other Implausibilities* (1972), *Earth's Other Shadow* (1973), and *The Feast of St. Dionysus* (1972), *Unfamiliar Territory* and *Capricorn Games* are his most daring and original ventures in this form. Silverberg's achievement here has not been entirely overlooked: his mastery of irony in the construction of his shorter fiction,

particularly in some stories of *Unfamiliar Territory*, has been ably described by Joseph Francavilla (RSMT 59-72). However, the technical innovation and thematic concerns of these tales have not been fully appreciated.

The title metaphor of *Unfamiliar Territory* suggests the direction that Silverberg takes in this collection, for he tries to break new ground both in subject and narrative form. The prevailing tone is one of detached and sophisticated irony at the expense of human pretensions, an irony sometimes balanced with a compassionate mood of sorrow over a planet whose beauty and resources are being wasted. However, concern with tricky innovation and verbal pyrotechnics is not only prominent but acknowledged in the Introduction, where Silverberg shows an understandable pride:

The tracers of literary influences will have much to deal with in *Unfamiliar Territory*. They'll easily discover the place where I tip my hat to Alfred Bester, and where I tug my thinning forelock for Philip K. Dick; but more astute critics are apt to notice several salutes to Donald Barthelme, one or two for Jorge Luis Borges, and an all out hip-hip-hurrah for Robert Coover. (But nobody is likely to guess that one story owes its being to the poet Armand Schwerner, so I acknowledge the debt here: but for Schwerner's brilliant cycle, *The Tablets*, there would have been no "Some Notes on the Pre-Dynastic Epoch." I hope Schwerner finds this out some day.) (UT xi)

Such a generous recognition of predecessors and influences is agreeable, but it may show a certain anxiety about an enormous debt to the creators of the "new" fiction—Coover, Gass, Barthelme, and above all, Borges. In point of fact, the influence of Bester and Dick does not seem very great, or at least it is scarcely more noticeable than in the earlier Silverberg. However, it would be difficult to imagine the existence of *Unfamiliar Territory* in its current form if such books as Coover's *Pricksongs and Descants* (1969) or John Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968) had not preceded it. This is an illustration of literary influence at its most powerful, as opposed to a search for minor echoes or variations on another writer's theme.

The short stories in *Unfamiliar Territory* might fairly be given the title of "metafiction," a term coined by Robert Scholes in *Fabulation and Metafiction* (1979). As Scholes describes it,

Metafiction assimilates all the perspectives of criticism into the fictional process itself. It may emphasize structural, formal, behavioral, or philosophical qualities, but most writers of metafiction are thoroughly aware of all these possibilities and are likely to have experimented with all of them. When extended, metafiction must either lapse into a more fundamental mode of fiction or risk losing all fictional interest in order to maintain its intellectual perspectives. The ideas that govern fiction assert themselves more powerfully in direct proportion to the length of a fictional work. Metafiction, then, tends toward brevity because it attempts, among other things, to assault or transcend the laws of fiction—an activity which can only be achieved from within fictional form. (Scholes 1979, 114)

Whether or not Silverberg's experimental fiction really attempts to "transcend the laws of fiction," it does reveal a weariness and impatience with the conventions of narrative, as Silverberg himself concedes. Both in form and thematic content, *Unfamiliar Territory* assaults dogmas; as we have already noted, the stories tend to reflect the disenchanted and apocalyptic mood of the early seventies. In that decade, influenced in part by the "new wave," other science fiction writers were drawn to similar experimental forms.⁷

When we turn to the individual pieces, we find that the tone of an era closing and situations involving impending disaster predominate. In "Caliban," for instance, a survivor from our time finds himself an anomaly in a changed world where everyone has been surgically and chemically altered to fit a stereotype. Reality seems to dissolve completely in the highly ironic "What We Learned in This Morning's Newspaper"; with greater irony, affluent tourists arrange time travel trips to a future when humans have perished in "When We Went to See the End of the World." Another ironic and ambiguous tale, "Some Notes on the Pre-Dynastic Epoch," describes the present from the point of view of a person who is either an archaeologist from the distant future, or someone who pretends to be; but whatever the case, present human reality has long since vanished and is being reconstructed as an archaeological project. The final story in the volume, "The Wind and the Rain" (an obvious allusion to Feste's song in *Twelfth Night*), is genuinely elegiac when it describes an earth without humanity, perhaps evoking memories of Ray Bradbury's similar story in *The Martian Chronicles*, "There Shall Come Soft Rains." Imagery or scenes implying the end of the modern era also appear in some of the other stories.

What conclusion is to be drawn from all this? Clearly the underlying mood of the volume is an apocalyptic one, although the apocalyptic themes emphasize defeat rather than a triumphant new beginning. None of the stories promises any kind of "new heaven and new earth" in the miraculous and transcendental form described in the last book of the Bible; instead, they merely present a world from which humanity, in its present incarnation and follies, has vanished.

The individual stories vary considerably in type, and most of them exhibit technical innovation or an unusual narrative mode of the sort Scholes associates with "metafiction." A brief glance will illustrate this point. The first, "Caught in the Organ Draft," describes a not-too-distant future when young people await a conscription notice requiring, instead of military service, one of their organs for organ bank storage in readiness for future transplants. This slight story is told from the point of view of a diary of a young man awaiting his summons. Although he contemplates flight or rebellion, and reflects on ancient styles of cannibalism, he accepts his fate when asked to donate a kidney. In fact, the narrator has been practicing self-deception, we realize, for despite all his thoughts of rebellion, he acquiesces to the de-

mands of the establishment, persuaded by the lure of money and special treatment.

The next story, "Now + n, Now - n," is somewhat more complex, since it deals with a theme Silverberg had toyed with in the early *Stepsons of Terra*, and later used for comic effect in *Up the Line*, namely the replicating of selves through time travel. The hero of this story is a trickster who has arranged to get another self two days ahead of his normal self, and a self two days behind; by sending telepathic messages from one self to another, the three—who are called "Now," "Now + n," and "Now - n"—are able to make a killing in the stock market and in other financial activities. Unfortunately, complications arise when one of the hero's selves falls in love with the seductive Selene, whose presence interferes with the telepathic communication he uses with his other selves. Forced to choose between the narcissistic pleasure of constant communication with the other selves, and life with his newfound love, the hero reluctantly opts for the latter. At the close, he expresses a forlorn hope that by learning her telepathic powers, he may also regain his own skills, and once again meet his replicas.

This work contains more comedy than undiluted irony, but much of its strength comes from the sophistication of the narrative mode. Silverberg's trickster narrates the story in a lively style, rendering the action in a series of scenes with ironic comment. In addition, Silverberg's technical skill is shown as he describes the events as a series of present happenings rather than in a linear retelling of past action.

Another story, "Some Notes on the Pre-Dynastic Epoch," takes a look at our current terrestrial culture from the point of view—ostensibly—of an archaeologist of the future in the "Dynastic" period. This story alternates between comment on the past and brief glances at the narrator's present; much of the narrative consists of fragments of literary works, news stories, and other examples of the printed word in contemporary culture. One of the most ironic of these is a news report on President Nixon's secretary of defense, Melvin Laird, dedicating a small room in the Pentagon "as a quiet place for meditation and prayer" during the height of the Vietnam War (UT 40). Moreover, the story is accompanied by other news releases that make anomalous companions for it.

The use of these items, which the narrator views as cultural artifacts, shows Silverberg's effort to incorporate into fiction many verbal constructs from the world of "normal" reality. However, the most significant quotation is a long passage from the biblical book of Daniel, wherein Belshazzar's empire is judged and condemned by the angelic handwriting on the wall: "Thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting." This statement is a final judgment on an arrogant and luxury-loving empire, appearing in the most apocalyptic book of the Old Testament. In this story it serves as a judgment both on our time and the narrator's time (if they are indeed different).

Yet perhaps the narrator's time and our time are the same and the narrator is a person from our era merely pretending to speak from a distant future. Silverberg creates this possibility by a deliberate self-reflexive use of ambiguity. At one point, the narrator writes, "None of the foregoing is true. I take pleasure in deceiving. I am an extremely unreliable witness" (UT 30). Later, at the story's close, the narrator goes further:

Let me unmask myself. Let me confess everything. There is no Center for Pre-Dynastic Studies. I am no Metalinguistic Archaeologist, Third Grade, living in a remote and idyllic era far in your future and passing my days in pondering the wreckage of the Twentieth Century. The time of the Dynast may be coming, but he does not yet rule. I am your contemporary. I am your brother. These notes are the work of a pre-dynastic man like yourself, a native of the so-called Twentieth Century, who, like you, has lived through dark hours and may live to see darker ones. That much is true. All the rest is fantasy of my own invention. Do you believe that? Do I seem reliable now? Can you trust me, just this once? (UT 44)

This confession is followed by a series of broken statements, as though the narrator's printer is skipping. The dissolution of narrative illusion is a typical experimental technique. Of course, the final questions only increase the ambiguity, rather than dispelling it.

Similar irony appears in a sardonic indictment of our culture's capacity for self-aggrandizement through expensive decadence in several other stories. "In the Group" does not employ technical innovation, but it satirizes the use of technological innovation to enhance sexual experience. Silverberg postulates the use of electronic communication devices to allow a group of people to share their sexual experiences with each other—evidently a sophisticated lampoon of the seventies interest in group sex. The hero, Murray, unfortunately finds that he is inordinately fond of his chief partner, Kay. Despite berating himself for "atavistic" attitudes and "nineteenth-century" possessiveness, he is unable to change. As he grows more possessive, his lady becomes more and more alienated; eventually she rejects him, and he is expelled from the group after he becomes impotent. His attitude is condemned by fellow members of the group as being one of "exclusivism" and is therefore "sick" and antisocial. The story ends with Murray trying to find a lasting love with a strange woman in another city. Thus the story's closure on an ironic note consolidates the irony of its design.

Probably the most acidulous of these satirical tales is "When We Went to See the End of the World," a story that deepens the satire of the novel *Up the Line*, regarding tourist use of time travel. Here, jet setters of the future make an amusing toy of time travel; travel agencies send them off to enjoy picnics while observing the last days of the planet earth, when life is reduced

to a giant crablike being crawling on a desolate beach. The conversation of the tourists is inane; even the mindless crustacean seems less banal.

Similarly, organized religion may become another form of cultural decadence, a substitute for genuine religious experience, or so the amusing story "Good News from the Vatican" implies. The primary religion satirized here is, of course, Roman Catholicism, perhaps the most highly organized and authoritarian religious establishment in world history, and the story focuses on one of the Church's most arcane and celebrated events, the selection of a new pope. A good deal of Machiavellian maneuvering produces a robot pope in Silverberg's story; but one of the characters is solemnly informed that this choice is appropriate for the era of the story for, according to Bishop Fitz-Patrick, "every era gets the Pope it deserves" (UT 101).

A much different kind of experimental "fiction"—to use an Anglicized version of Borges's term, *ficciones*—is "Many Mansions," a short story of multiple time travel narratives that also present alternative versions of reality.⁸ An American model for this kind of story is Robert Coover's "The Baby Sitter,"⁹ in which a narrative situation is developed in a variety of opposing and contradictory ways.⁹ In one version, for instance, the baby sitter is seduced; in an alternative narrative, she is murdered by intruders. The consequence of such a group of multiple narratives is to suggest an absurd and surrealist version of an ordinary situation.

In "Many Mansions," Silverberg presents a variety of situations involving Ted, who longs for an affair with the beautiful Ellie; his bitter wife, Alice; and his grandfather, Martin, who has a lecherous yearning for Alice. In one version of the basic narrative, Martin travels backward in time to make love to Alice; but in a variation, Alice travels backward in time to murder Martin, and thereby make certain that Ted is never born. Neither the grandfather nor the wife is especially likeable in any of the continuums, and the husband, while sympathetic, appears rather weak. This variety of fictive situations demonstrates the intensity of complicated family antipathies. Yet the multiple narratives also show that reality may assume an absurd look no matter what choices are made in a given human situation.

"What We Learned from This Morning's Newspaper," by contrast, returns to a familiar mordant satirical tone. Here a suburban neighborhood is excited by the appearance of an edition of a newspaper from next week; but such knowledge of the future is put to its most unimaginative use. Everyone wants to use information on the future stock market to become rich. This is a variation of the theme of "Now + n, Now - n," where splendid gifts, time travel and telepathy, are used for material gain. In essence, Silverberg's protagonists in these stories tend to be a variety of modern Esaus, selling their birthrights for messes of pottage (that is, money). At the end of "What We Learned from This Morning's Newspaper," the characters are punished appropriately, for their knowledge of the future turns to dust, as the newsprint vanishes from the papers, and reality itself

seems to dissolve into ambiguity and confusion. Like "Many Mansions," this tale goes beyond mere satire on human greed or malice to suggest that reality itself has an absurd and surrealist quality.

A similar vision is expressed in "In Entropy's Jaws," a long story that is not only the best in the book, but one of Silverberg's finest. Here John Skein, a telepath, tries to put his mental pieces together after a case of burnout following an overload of his mind's circuits caused by making a communications hookup of two other powerful minds. His breakdown has come as a result of hubris, for he had been warned against placing so great a strain on his faculties. Silverberg's narrative is a brilliant example of "meta-fiction" devices since what could have been a linear narrative is related in a weird series of fragmented scenes, many of them hallucinatory. Time and "entropy" are not to be cheated, for at closure Skein learns that he himself is the skull-faced man, destined to spend much of his life on the desolate planet Abbondanza VI, waiting for his own appearance. Before this ironic epiphany, however, the narrative takes a number of serpentine twists, as Skein visits many of the renowned shrines of earth, like the cathedral of Hagia Sophia. In sum, an ironic vision of a bleak future world is presented through his consciousness. Between narrative segments there are memorable quotations that are expository meditations on the effects of entropy, the latent tendency of all things to wear out. All in all, the story unifies disparate elements effectively.

Unfamiliar Territory ends with "The Wind and the Rain," a poetic and elegiac meditation on a future earth from which human life has vanished. The narrator in this story is a compassionate visitor from another planet who considers how war and pollution, two aspects of human stupidity and arrogance, have left the earth in a state requiring purification. The final irony in this brief story is sharp: rumors of a colony of surviving earthmen in Tibet arouse hope, but when the narrator arrives there, his expedition finds only a robot.

The stories in *Unfamiliar Territory* are uniformly excellent, but there is another achievement of the volume that is worthy of comment. As can be said of only a few story collections, the book achieves a unity greater than the mere sum of its parts. These tales offer an impressive vision of an empty and futile future, when humanity either will have entered a final state of decadence, or will have ceased to exist. Not many short story collections, in science fiction or in conventional literature, succeed in creating the unity of tone and vision characteristic of a novel: James Joyce's *Dubliners* and Ernest Hemingway's *In Our Time* may be invoked as classic examples of this rare achievement, but *Unfamiliar Territory* achieves a similar unity of effect. It is clearly a masterful example of literary virtuosity.

Another imaginative volume of short stories from Silverberg's typewriter is *Capricorn Games*, which the hardcover blurb described as "a master at-

tempt to make unconventional use of the traditional subject matter of science fiction." Although this collection does not attain the distinction of *Unfamiliar Territory*, it includes a number of fine imaginative efforts, as does *The Feast of St. Dionysus* (discussed in chapter 4). While extended comment on these stories might over-emphasize their importance, a recognition of the merits of a few is appropriate. It is significant to note that the stories in *Capricorn Games* are less concerned with narrative experiment than are those in *Unfamiliar Territory*. Yet, these stories are, on balance, equally rich in imaginative wealth and literary allusion. However, the collection, as a whole, does not create the unified effect of a consistent vision. (Both volumes were published later in one 1986 collection, *Beyond the Safe Zone*.)

The titular story, "Capricorn Games," is fairly representative of the volume's strengths. Somewhat surprisingly, it uses a young woman as its center of consciousness, since Silverberg's protagonists tend to be predominantly male. Its drama arises from Nikki's encounter at a party with a philosopher of vast experience, "the celebrated Nicholson, who had lived a thousand years, and who said he could help others to do the same" (CG 3). He is an exponent of Jungian mysticism, who espouses the importance of the mandala symbolism at the heart of Jung's psychology. Nicholson's credo is crystallized in a few memorable sentences:

The essential thing that every mandala has is a center: the place where everything is born, the eye of God's mind, the heart of darkness and of light, the core of the storm. All right: you must move toward the center, find the vortex at the boundary of Yang and Yin, place yourself right at the mandala's midpoint. Center yourself. Do you follow the metaphor? Center yourself at *now*, the eternal *now*. To move off center is to move forward toward death, backward toward birth, always the fatal polar swings; but if you're capable of positioning yourself constantly at the focus of the mandala, right on center, you have access to the fountain of renewal, you become an organism capable of constant self-healing, constant self-replenishment, constant expansion into regions beyond self. (CG 9-10)

At first Nikki and the reader are inclined to view these statements with scepticism, but when a telepath establishes a link between Nikki and Nicholson, enabling her to see into his mind, she confronts his memories of the past thousand years and learns that he has survived by constant self-renewal. Yet the staggering total of his experiences astonishes her, and she finally recoils from Nicholson in horror. The mere thought of living for a thousand years and encompassing so wide a range of experiences is frightening. As a result, Nikki leaves the party with a different fellow, a mediocre man with whom she feels comfortable. Silverberg's theme is the Swiftian idea that longevity might prove a demanding gift, more a burden than a blessing. A secondary theme is Silverberg's speculative look at the potential value of

mandala symbolism; his interest is evidence of his persistent quest for transcendental experience.

Another significant story in this volume, "The Science Fiction Hall of Fame," examines the contrasts between conventional realistic fiction and science fiction. The narrator sees himself as a "flesh-and-blood personification of the Science Fiction Hall of Fame" because of his wide experience as a reader (CG 26). Much of the story plays off imaginative scenes from science fiction against his meditations on the genre. Is it "simple-minded escape literature, lacking relevance to daily life and useful only as self-contained diversion?" Or is its true nature "subtle and elusive, accessible only to those capable and willing to penetrate the experiential substructure concealed by those broad metaphors of galactic empires and supernormal powers" (CG 30)? The hero wavers between one view and another, and is sometimes drawn to both opinions at once.

As the story unfolds, pastiches of science fiction adventure continue to alternate with events from everyday life, until at last the protagonist recalls his brief and cynical affair with the wife of a friend. This episode is unflattering to all, but especially to the narrator. In the final analysis, he appears to be a sceptical modern man without roots and values, who finds a momentary release in imaginary adventures in alien universes. Although a sense of irony plays a dominant role in this tale, its theme is the narrator's complete alienation from other humans and the cosmos. In this story and another in the volume, "Schwartz between the Galaxies," Silverberg describes existential anxiety very well, as Letson has pointed out (RSMT 111-114).

Probably the best story in *Capricorn Games* is also one of the most surprising—"The Dybbuk of Mazel Tov IV," a tale in which Silverberg treats Jewish legend lightly, yet also endows it with new vigor in the setting of an alien planet. Here a "dybbuk," or ghost of a man recently dead, takes possession of a Kunivar, or local alien, near a colony of two Jewish communities, a liberal enclave and a closely knit band of Hasidic Jews. The narrator, a complacent liberal, has his smug assumptions shattered by the appearance of the dybbuk, for it resurrects a legend he had thought discredited as mere superstition. Even more astonished is the liberal rabbi, who finds the existence of a dybbuk virtually impossible to accept (partly because, one suspects, the rabbi has worked hard to repress his own latent desire to venerate the old traditions). The dybbuk, something of a comic figure, is peculiarly insistent and obnoxious in its demand for attention, an amusing touch that heightens the comedy. At last, the liberal community is obliged to turn for help to a leader they have despised, the "tzaddik" of the Hasidic community, more a primitive shaman than a rabbi. The tzaddik, Reb Shmuel, a powerful figure with an imposing presence, arrives to perform an exorcism and does it effectively.

The story concludes with comic reversals that allow none of the characters to come off looking morally superior, although all gain a measure of self-

respect. Impressed by the tzaddik's command of enormous spiritual power, the Kunivari announce that they wish to become Jews. Unfortunately, the tzaddik can command miracles, but he cannot accept a new idea; he finds the prospect of Jews with six limbs and green fur appalling and stalks off, followed by his Hasidic disciples. Humiliated by the presence of the dybbuk and the tzaddik's successful shamanism, the liberal rabbi and his followers are now able to reassert their sense of intellectual superiority by accepting the aliens as converts to Judaism. Thus all suffer through a humbling process, and all are finally vindicated.

This story is both richly comic and compassionate, and makes amusing use of Silverberg's ethnic heritage. Its warmth and humanity are sufficiently genial to make us wish that Silverberg had written more stories drawing on the rich treasure of Jewish myth and legend.

As a look at these stories demonstrates, Silverberg's art in *Capricorn Games* is, if anything, often richer and more humane than in *Unfamiliar Territory*. Some of the same qualities are also displayed in the tales in *The Feast of St. Dionysus*, particularly in the title story (discussed elsewhere) and in the final story, "This Is the Road." Indeed, this survey of Silverberg's achievements in short fiction would not be complete without at least a side-long glance at "This Is the Road."

The novella takes place in some distant future, when humanity has evolved into a number of different forms and animals, or "underbreeds," have attained sentience, much like the mutations in Cordwainer Smith's future history stories.¹⁰ The main action concerns a journey in an "air-wagon" by four oddly assorted creatures called Leaf, Sting, Crown, and Shadow, as they flee from marauders called "The Teeth" to a sanctuary in the mountains. The primitive setting, the tranquil tone, and characters who conjoin human and animal talents give the story a mythopoeic or myth-making aura. The cooperation of the mutants as a team and their final success make this a satisfying work, written in a restrained and disciplined style. This is not a mere adventure story, for "This Is the Road" turns away from the ironic tone of much of Silverberg's short fiction to provide a reassuring testimony of enduring faith in life, even for the strange group who battle for survival here.

To sum up, Silverberg's work in shorter fiction in his first major phase, 1969-74, was overshadowed by the impressive novels he produced during that time. However, he clearly emerged as a master of short fiction in these years, building on experience in the shorter forms during his apprentice and journeyman periods. His achievement as an author of short stories and novelles during this first mature period is impressive. In fact, it fares well when compared to the better experimental writers of "metafiction" who influenced him, including Barth, Coover, Gass, and Borges.

6

Trial by the Furnace: The Labyrinths of Society and History, 1969–1976

Although much of Silverberg's fiction in his third period was concerned with the quest for transcendence, as we have seen, and with the frustration of that quest, or with ambiguous answers, his work continued to describe society's flaws and evils. The nature of social existence has engaged Silverberg's imagination throughout his career. His second adult novel, *Master of Life and Death*, described the conflicts of a new administrator who tries to manipulate a world government for the good of humanity. With appropriate symmetry, Silverberg closed out this phase of his career with *Shadrach in the Furnace* (1976), a novel in which his hero uses guile to gain a position of supreme power, allowing him to become an enlightened despot who will attempt to provide universal health care and foster intellectual advance. However, before Shadrach's moment of triumph, Silverberg would examine many injustices and frustrations, including David Selig's self-imposed isolation in *Dying Inside* (1972).

To reach Shadrach's position requires the hero to master the intricacies of the labyrinth, like the Greek hero, Theseus. In this context, the labyrinth can be seen as a symbol of the maze of modern society—with its history of victimized peoples and ethnic groups seeking justice and restitution. We should not be surprised to discover that the labyrinth is a recurring symbol in much of Silverberg's fiction, and this metaphor, signifying political and social history, will appear frequently in our discussion of his fiction in this context.

A retrospective glance will remind us of Silverberg's varying use of the labyrinth symbol. In *The Man in the Maze*, the labyrinth was a symbol of

alienation and the maze of the self. However, John Oxenshuer, in "The Feast of St. Dionysus," finds that the "City of the Word of God" is laid out as a labyrinth of houses and streets, more a sign of mystery than revelation. Again, the symbol will appear in the Majipoor books, where the monarch must eventually retreat to the darkened labyrinth to assume the responsibilities of a moral and spiritual leader, the Pontifex. There the labyrinth becomes a palace, suggesting humility and spiritual wisdom.

Whether the labyrinth is a metaphor for the wilderness of self, the waste of modern society, the confusion of religious quest, the struggle for self-knowledge, or all these, it is a major symbol in Silverberg's mature fiction. Since history, politics, and society are labyrinthine worlds in the social novels of the third period, it emerges as a convenient metaphor for the frustrating problems of society and history.

Two important juvenile novels of this time, *Across a Billion Years* (1969), which is treated here because of its thematic concern with history, and *World's Fair, 1992* (1970), present history and social conflict from a mature perspective. Both are ambitious works on the scale of *The Gate of Worlds*, and their quality enlarges Silverberg's stature as an author of young adult fiction. *Across a Billion Years* is one of Silverberg's most enjoyable novels, and is probably his best juvenile, as Clareson contends (RS 27). Although the book depicts the past as an intellectual labyrinth, it is a maze through which the archaeologist may walk with rational understanding. "History" in this novel is not simply the recorded past, but the longest period imaginable in which intelligent life could have flourished—the "billion years" of the title.

The story is presented as a series of tapes, or "message cubes" (a literary device resembling the letters of the traditional epistolary novel), by a young archaeologist, Tom Rice, on an expedition to find the legendary "High Ones," supposedly an ancient sentient species who were the first to establish a high civilization. Rice's tapes are addressed to his twin sister, Lorie, back on earth. Although Lorie is handicapped and confined to her bed, she is also a telepath who belongs to an interplanetary telepathic network used by space travelers. Because of her close relationship with her twin, Lorie functions symbolically as a Jungian anima figure, and as a symbol of Tom's love for humanity and higher values, as well as being a sensitive receiver of Tom's candid confessions and self-revelations.¹

The narrative point of view encourages stylistic liveliness: Tom's descriptions are interlaced with amusing twenty-fourth-century collegiate slang invented by Silverberg, such as "zooby" and "chimpo" to describe behavior that twentieth-century young people might call "flaky." At first, Tom is severely critical of his fellow archaeologists, and he expresses unthinking prejudice toward the female android member of the team, Kelly Watchman. As the journey progresses, his attitudes change, and he develops a greater

sense of compassion and understanding of his companions, an odd assortment. The major change is shown in his evolving relationship with Jan Mortenson, an attractive young woman of his own age (a pretty and intelligent blond who has a dash of another species in her genetic inheritance). Silverberg's skillful treatment of a gradually evolving romance between Tom and Jan provides an emotional dimension that was new in his young adult fiction.

However, the comic narrative tone and the deftly handled love story serve as a counterpoint to serious archaeology. Since Tom has rebelled against his father's pragmatic materialism by becoming an archaeologist, he sees his profession in the light of romantic adventure. Moreover, Tom recognizes that archaeology, quite as much as the physical sciences, embodies scientific curiosity that is devoted to the sacred vocation of rediscovering the past, the world of lost cities and vanished civilizations described in Silverberg's non-fiction. For Tom, as for Indiana Jones, archaeology becomes a religion.

The expedition's search for the original sentient species takes them from planet to planet, with fresh finds providing excitement. On one world, Tom unearths by sheer luck a globe containing an important date; on another planet they find an artifact of the High Ones, a highly intelligent robot made millions of years ago, which still functions. The robot, in turn, reveals that the High Ones left his planet only within the last seventy million years, and tries to locate the star where their home planet is located. The star seems to have vanished until the robot solves the mystery: it is revealed that his masters, the High Ones or *Mirt Korp Ahm*, have hidden their star and its system by means of a "Dyson sphere," using an advanced concept of physics.

This revelation is followed by a visit to the home world of the High Ones, which the expedition names "Mirt." The *Mirt Korp Ahm* are found to be still living, rather than extinct as experts had thought; but they exist in a "zombie-like" state of advanced senility, in which they are sustained by life support machines. Unlike humans, they are a passive species that long ago had reached a satisfactory level of civilization and then withdrew from active contact with other life forms.

Contact with the High Ones leads to the kind of treasures adolescents dream of finding. Tom's expedition discovers most of the artifacts of their civilization intact, and in this windfall they come upon what Tom considers to be the greatest prize: a device enabling humans to communicate with each other telepathically. Tom hails this machine—the "thought amplifier"—as the solution to the problem of human loneliness and cosmic alienation that afflicts all except telepaths. Preparing to don the "thought amplifier" apparatus, he reflects: "All my life had been only a prologue to this moment, all the years of being incomplete, isolated, cut off. Now I saw a chance to become complete after all" (AABY 243). It should be noted that Tom's self-revelation to his sister represents a desperate need to find

psychic wholeness through communication, a recurrent theme in Silverberg's fiction. Tom acknowledges that his narrative of the journey has, ironically, been rendered obsolete because he can now communicate telepathically with Lorie, and in the process of doing so, he is startled by his discovery that his twin, though handicapped, has lived a much fuller emotional life than he because of her gift for telepathic communication.

Thus the novel ends with an epiphany, a moment of understanding, revealing the need for human wholeness and unity, the obsessive theme that inspired *Nightwings* and other speculative religious fiction discussed earlier. All things considered, *Across a Billion Years* is not only Silverberg's best juvenile, but remains possibly one of the better science fiction novels for young readers. It contains humor, a dash of romance, fine characterizations, a lost race, excellent writing, a provocative discovery, urbane tolerance, erudition about science and archaeology, and a mature theme.

As we have noted, Silverberg had already used the "lost race" theme in an early juvenile—a slight performance called *Lost Race of Mars* (1960). In that little tale, two children emigrate with their father and mother from earth to a colony on Mars and discover "Old Martians" still surviving in a cave. In some respects this was a faint sketch of the theme of *Across a Billion Years*.

Nevertheless, Silverberg got a good deal of mileage from his idea of a lost race of "Old Martians": he returned to it in a satirical 1964 novel for adults, *Regan's Planet*, and would use it for a third time. In *Regan's Planet*, a Machiavellian promoter, Claud Regan, had undertaken the job of developing a world's fair to open in 1992. To raise money for this grandiose scheme, Regan had kidnapped some "Old Martians" and had them brought to the satellite as attractions. The novel was not reissued, partly because, as Silverberg wrote in an introduction to its sequel, much of its future history was dated (WF1992 viii). Moreover, the novel lacked sympathetic characters and a consistent focus for its satire.

However, the sequel to *Regan's Planet*, *World's Fair, 1992* (1970), is a juvenile of high quality. This book returns to the satellite world of the world's fair and to the Old Martian theme once again, but with more assurance. Silverberg's hero, Bill Hastings, an All-American type, wins an essay contest for which the prize is an appointment to the scientific staff overseeing the Old Martians at the World's Fair, located on a space satellite. Hastings, who has the ambition of becoming a xenologist (a scientist who studies aliens), had taken first place by hypothesizing the possibility of life on Pluto, despite the high odds against it.

While living on the satellite world before the fair opens in 1992, Hastings enlarges his awareness of other matters. Discovering the professional jealousies among scientists and the ethical compromises they make because of ambition, he loses his naiveté. Hastings also engages in a flirtation and a

short romance with Emily Blackman, an audacious and spoiled debutante, the daughter of Senator Blackman.

After the mild social comedy of the early and middle portions of *World's Fair*, 1992, the action rises to more dramatic levels. With the fair in financial trouble, Claud Regan makes another of his spectacular gambles by sending an expedition to Pluto to find the intelligent life postulated in Bill's essay. Naturally, Hastings is selected to be one of the explorers who go to the "rim of the solar system." In an effective action sequence, Bill and the scientists voyage to the frozen world of Pluto, locate gigantic crablike life forms, and bring them back to general acclaim. This discovery creates the sensation the fair needs, and Bill becomes a celebrity.

However, the novel ends on a more realistic note. Bill is disappointed to learn that while he was away, his spoiled girlfriend, Emily, has decided to marry an old childhood sweetheart. He reflects, ruefully, at the story's close that middle-class American boys who appear to enact the American dream are not always rewarded by marriage to beautiful rich women. Moreover, he faces a future of arduous study before becoming a professional scientist.

Here again, Silverberg produced an impressive young adult novel that shows the hero's growth toward emotional and moral maturity. Although not as speculative as *Across a Billion Years*, *World's Fair*, 1992 contains a mature wisdom—a surprising change from the usual science fiction novel for adolescents. Probably *World's Fair*, 1992 would have had a higher reputation if it had not been overshadowed by the excellence of other Silverberg novels. In both of these young adult works, Silverberg leads younger readers to confront serious moral questions.

Although Silverberg's juveniles raise serious moral and social issues, the form allowed him to offer some comforting answers. In the comic and satirical time travel novel, *Up the Line* (1969), the protagonist's chief fault is his refusal to confront moral questions seriously. The early novel, *Stepsons of Terra*, played amusing games with the possibilities of time travel; and time travel also provides the basic premise for *The Time Hoppers*, a tired dystopia, and *The Masks of Time*, a serious and realistic novel. Silverberg continued to work variations on the theme of time travel in *Up the Line* (1969).

By contrast with earlier time travel novels, *Up the Line* is lively and ingenious, but it remains a light and satirical novel. *Up the Line* takes as its premise a twenty-first century where travel to the past is a routine tourist activity, controlled and regulated by a government agency called the Time Service. The narrator, a bored and adventurous youth, Judson Daniel Elliott III, has joined the Time Service to escape twenty-first-century ennui and to learn more about Byzantine culture, a subject he dreams of studying at the doctoral level at an Ivy League university. Elliott is one of Silverberg's fully

developed trickster heroes—a type Silverberg had experimented with in earlier books.

The confidence trickster is, of course, an archetypal comic hero in the myths and legends of primitive peoples, as Paul Radin's famous study of American Indian mythology shows. We should note that this type entered sophisticated Middle Eastern and European literature at an early period, appearing in the Old Testament in the stories of Jacob and in Greek epic in the character of the immortal Odysseus. As a character in comic fiction and drama, the trickster is a commonplace figure, taking the roles of clown, tricky servant, and even hero.²

At any rate, *Up the Line* describes a rogue's "progress," in a picaresque and entertaining tale that never quite reaches the level of Silverberg's best work. Perhaps this is because Elliott never becomes wholly sympathetic. Elliott is an amoral rascal who has numerous sexual misadventures, most of which are described in an urbane tone. However, Elliott is simply a grandiose tour guide who takes tourists back into the past—or "up the line," as he calls it—to witness the legendary moments of history.

As we expect, this wise-cracking first-person narrator takes us through a series of comic adventures, usually involving liaisons with attractive women, while conducting tourists to different eras in Byzantium's long history. Finally, Elliott makes the mistake of developing an obsession with a voluptuous young Greek woman. While carrying on this intrigue, he commits the unforgivable sin of "replicating" himself, whereupon his error puts him in disgrace, destroys his career, and makes him the target of the dreaded Time Patrol. Consequently, Elliott's narrative ends in mid-sentence: it was being dictated to a taping machine and presumably his existence has been canceled by the Time Patrol, secret agents who punish those who abuse time travel.

Thus this satirical novel ends with a touch of sardonic irony at the narrator's expense. Although Elliott is an entertaining narrator, he displays a sexist attitude toward women and a frivolous view of the past. As a result, we do not really care about his fate. Silverberg's irony, in fact, distances the author from his narrator, a matter overlooked by Rafeeq O. McGiveron, who justifiably complains of Elliott's sneers at homosexuals in an essay on Silverberg's treatment of sexuality (McGiveron 40–41). Elliott's fate, in fact, is symbolic: he tries to make history his playground, but eventually his lack of moral seriousness leads to his justified removal from the maze of history.

Whatever one thinks of *Up the Line*, this novel, like Silverberg's earlier time travel stories, makes a genuine contribution to science fiction tradition. These works reveal the ambivalence toward historical time that Andrew Gordon perceives in Silverberg's time travel tales, and which he finds demonstrated in Silverberg's fine short story "In Entrophy's Jaws." Gordon's 1982 essay in *Extrapolation*, "Silverberg's Time Machine," is a valuable study of this short story and of the different ways in which Silverberg treats the con-

cept of time in his work.³ The paradoxes of time travel, however, remain secondary to comedy and social satire in *Up the Line*: neither Elliott nor the tourists he shepherds display a serious attitude toward history.

In a more serious novel, *Tower of Glass* (1970), Silverberg created a future historical situation with dramatic social conflict, indirectly reflecting some of the tensions erupting in the late 1960s. *Tower of Glass* is a strong and frequently poetic work that moves beyond the ironic limits of Silverberg's shorter fiction or of his much admired *Dying Inside*. As a tragic novel whose excesses resemble those in a Jacobean drama, *Tower of Glass* is not a flawless work of art, but its passion and excesses are evidence of imaginative vigor. To use another comparison, the novel is occasionally reminiscent of a twenties silent film classic—Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* is the obvious parallel—in its conscious employment of biblical archetypes and potent religious icons to project a vision of an unjust society where technological innovations are extrapolated to inhuman extremes, and where a working class is exploited.⁴

As with Silverberg's best fiction, the novel makes use of familiar motifs but invests them with new force. Simeon Krug, one of Silverberg's arrogant imperialists and self-made millionaires, is a developer of androids who have human bodies and minds that are human in most respects. Since Krug's corporation exploits them, and since their legal status is merely that of property, Silverberg focuses on the theme of the androids' need to be recognized as human. This theme is combined with a study of Krug's arrogance. Determined to build a gigantic tower of glass bricks in the frozen wastes near Hudson Bay, Krug sacrifices all, including his feelings and his family, to his purpose. The structure will not be a mere monument to his power: it is intended to provide a more effective means of communication with a distant star system where life may exist. Both labor and technological expertise for the tower's construction are supplied by Krug's androids, who are being used in the manner of the slaves who built the pyramids of Egypt, or the African slaves who supported the antebellum economy of the Old South.

In such a situation, oppressed people look for a deliverer and Krug's chief android, Thor Watchman, the superintendent of the project, longs to become his people's Moses. Unfortunately, he also tends to idolize Krug as a father or creator figure. Although Krug is a ruthless man of pure will, like the technocratic manager, Jon Fredersen, in *Metropolis*, Krug's romantic son Manuel is a sensitive reformer, resembling Fredersen's son, who was a sentimental humanist. Both feel moral sensitivity for exploited workers, and both are driven by a deep longing to help them. Manuel's sentiments are stimulated into action under the influence of a beautiful android mistress, Lilith, although her true love is Thor Watchman. However, Watchman is restrained by his devotion to the official android religion, a synthesis of meliorist elements from Judaism, Christianity, and Buddhism, all focused on the worship of Krug, the creator and supposed redeemer of the androids.

Watchman is always careful to explain that he worships the idea of Krug as a powerful creator and that the earthly Krug is only a manifestation of this idea; but in actuality he tends to venerate Krug the person and expects him eventually to liberate the androids from their slavery. Hence Watchman ignores the activist androids who have created the Android Equality party. Neither Manuel nor Watchman can persuade Krug to change his conviction that androids are inferior beings, virtually a different species who deserve their status as slaves.

Finally, when Watchman undergoes the experience of "shunting" or temporarily exchanging egos with another person, he learns how intractable Krug's attitudes are and informs the followers of the official android faith that there is no hope for relief from their supposed redeemer. Android servants and slaves respond with worldwide rioting and acts of defiance, and Watchman avenges the shattering of his illusions by having his workers melt the polar ice around Krug's tower, causing the tower to collapse. Furious at the destruction of his power fantasy, Krug retaliates by killing the unresisting Watchman, hurling the android into the transmat field—used for teleportation—without the proper preparation, thereby disintegrating Watchman's molecules. After this act of revenge, Krug abdicates his power, leaving his son Manuel in charge of the remnants of his empire amid worldwide chaos, and sets off for a distant galaxy in a starship he has been constructing.

Although such a bare summary recounts the often melodramatic action of the novel, it scarcely does justice to its emotional impact. As we have noted, the conflict between Manuel Krug and Simeon Krug over the treatment of the androids echoes the conflict between Fredersen and his son Freder in Fritz Lang's silent film classic, *Metropolis* (1926), and the anguish of the androids is similar to the miserable state of the workers in that film. Silverberg's novel differs from *Metropolis*, however, in that it does not postulate a loving feminine principle (the film's Maria) to reconcile the overbearing father and the rebellious son. However, since the happy ending of *Metropolis* is unconvincing to thoughtful viewers, Silverberg probably deserves credit for resolving this struggle in a more realistic fashion.

Silverberg's major characters are drawn with bold strokes, suggesting a conscious use of archetypal figures. Simeon Krug, for instance, is both a familiar type in the Silverberg canon and a tyrannical dictator who suggests numerous biblical analogues. The ruthless industrialist is reminiscent of the dominating Machiavellian figures in Silverberg's earlier work, such as Minner Burris of *Thorns* and Charles Boardman of *The Man in the Maze*. Ultimately, all of these symbolic embodiments of pure ego and ruthless figures would be consolidated into the nightmarish tyrant Genghis Mao of *Shadrach in the Furnace*.

Even more interesting are the biblical predecessors of Krug. His desire to build a massive tower reaching into space as a monument to his ego is an obvious embodiment of the hubris associated with Nimrod and other tyrants

in the Tower of Babel legend from the antediluvian period depicted in Genesis. Moreover, Krug's exploitation of androids and their inferior status resembles the Egyptian pharaohs' oppression of the Hebrews in the construction of the pyramids, expressing the Egyptian longing for immortality. Since Krug is also, in a sense, the creator of the androids, there is a sharply ironic parallel with the grim creator God of the Old Testament, a mythic analogue reinforced by the android religion developed by such leaders as Thor Watchman. Finally, when Krug destroys Watchman, his creation, and therefore by metaphorical extension his "son," Krug seems to become a brutal parody of the Christian conception of God as a wrathful judge who sends his son Christ to earth to be executed to atone for human sin. A study of such biblical parallels and influences was made by George W. Tuma in an article in *Extrapolation* in the early seventies.⁵ Clearly, these mythic parallels tend to enrich the tragic irony of the novel.

Yet Krug also has human weaknesses and his humanity serves to counterpoint his ruthless and overbearing will; but his humane feelings are subordinated to the essential inhumanity of his actions and his self-glorifying vision. Even in his relinquishment of power at the novel's end, Krug does not fully elicit the reader's sympathy, and the strongest negative judgment to be made of him is to apply a comment often made about Mary Shelley's Dr. Frankenstein: just as Frankenstein's monster, his creation, is more human than Frankenstein, so too are Krug's androids more human than Krug.⁶

A better developed tragic hero than Krug is Thor Watchman, surely one of the finer android characters in science fiction. Watchman is given a full range of human feelings although he did not experience a human childhood, and although he lacks the ability to reproduce himself. Indeed, Watchman believes that he does not have the usual human male sex drive, but his strong sexual nature only requires Lilith to awaken it. As an alpha, the highest of three levels of android intelligence, Watchman is not only very intelligent, but also an excellent supervisor and leader. However, it is his spiritual aspirations that make him exceptional: while worshiping Krug, he still hopes to be the android Moses, but instead he becomes an android martyr or Christ figure.

While Thor Watchman is a credible tragic hero, and Krug a tragic villain, if not a tragic hero inspiring sympathy, Manuel Krug and Lilith, his android mistress, are also drawn with skill. Since Manuel's name suggests the biblical Immanuel, one of the names given to Christ, it appears that Manuel may have been intended as a Christ figure and a human counterpart for Watchman. Indeed, Manuel plays a Christ-like role for a time, preaching compassion, but he is finally too weak a character to play a memorable role in the climactic scenes of the novel. Here, Manuel is eclipsed by Watchman, and he remains a passive observer while Watchman is martyred by Krug's wrath.

Yet Manuel's experience is a significant part of the novel, and Silverberg is sufficiently concerned with this character to shift the narrative style to the first person for important scenes involving Manuel, the most notable in-

stance being Manuel's trip with Lilith to the android ghetto, Gamma Town. This descent of Manuel and Lilith to the world of the most despised social class is one of the central sequences in the novel, representing a symbolic journey to the underworld or through the labyrinth, a ritual ordeal enlarging the hero's awareness in classical epic. Yet Manuel is not entirely satisfactory either as a sacrificial martyr, a role Watchman's sacrifice preempts from Manuel; or in the role of humanitarian reformer, which his father bequeaths to Manuel in the ambiguous ending. Manuel's ability to promote effective social reform remains doubtful.

Lilith is a stronger character than Manuel, although as a tragic protagonist her status is secondary. Given the name of the mythic temptress of Hebraic tradition, she has been constructed as a specialist at providing sexual pleasure; yet she also is committed to the cause of android liberation, which she serves by employing her arts on Manuel. Moreover, she is not merely an adroit mistress: her capacity to love is demonstrated by her relationship with Watchman. Although her name has negative connotations, she is a sympathetic figure, and one of Silverberg's more memorable feminine characters.

Finally, the tower is an impressive icon satirizing the arrogance of modern technological civilization. Different characters refer to it by varying names, from "the first cathedral of the galactic age," to the most prodigious of all phallic symbols (TOG 15). Towers have always been symbols of human pride, and the destruction of this one represents the probable collapse of a technological civilization that is unable to rectify social injustice or to recognize the full equality of its exploited classes. In this respect, the novel shows similarities to Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), which probably influenced it, and anticipates *Blade Runner* (1982), the Ridley Scott film inspired by Dick's novel. All suggest that androids are essentially human.

Despite the strengths of *Tower of Glass*, it is an imperfect novel and its flaws are obvious. At times the intense narration seems undisciplined and lacking in restraint, and the novel displays some rough edges. The action is frequently melodramatic; but these flaws are balanced by vitality and moral seriousness. At any rate, the novel is concerned with the exploitation of conscious beings. To describe *Tower of Glass* reductively as a "parable about racism," as John J. Pierce does in *Odd Genre* (152), is an odd comment, facile and perfunctory.

Whereas *Tower of Glass* contains elements of tragedy, there is only sardonic irony in Silverberg's bleakest work of social criticism, which began to appear in serial form in 1970 but was not published in book form until 1971. *The World Inside*, expanding the dystopian vision of the short story "A Happy Day in 2381" to novel length, extrapolates the threat of an overpopulated world to nightmarish extremes. As in the short story (which serves as the first chapter of the novel), the horribly overcrowded, underfed

condition of earth is used as the premise for establishing a mindless society where fertility is celebrated as worship of God, privacy is proscribed, and most of humanity is packed into gigantic "Urban Monads," enormous high-rise buildings, each of which is considered a single city. Everyone is programmed to be happy and cheerful, despite the insanity of the lifestyle in these urban towers, or "Urbmons."

Concern with overpopulation had been a persistent theme in Silverberg's career. In *The World Inside*, Silverberg made a serious bid to produce a dystopian satire worthy of comparison with *Brave New World* and *1984*. Because he followed the pattern of a classic dystopia, the novel has received a good deal of respect from such critics as Clareson, although he acknowledges that it is only Mattern who is an effective character (RS 61-63). Unfortunately, despite his mature novelistic skill, *The World Inside* is a rather disappointing book. Silverberg's mastery of plot and narrative technique is present, but literary craft and an important theme cannot offset other weaknesses: thin characters, language that only occasionally rises above mediocrity, and lack of intellectual conflict.

Clearly the Urbmon complex is the "hero-villain" of the novel, as Thomas Dunn and Richard Erlich have pointed out in a fine article in *Extrapolation*.⁷ Yet the question arises as to whether the basic situation of overpopulation is not itself the villain. Given an impossibly large populace on earth, the dominant social tone encouraging more breeding and more children (in the name of the Lord, an official policy that shows the debasement of popular religion into a weapon of government propaganda) is obviously institutionalized stupidity carried to lunacy. However, the world described in the novel is a place where social ills have progressed to a condition that almost seems beyond remedy. Hence, Silverberg's social satire is directed not so much against a social system that represses individual freedom and destroys the rights of privacy, as against human stupidity itself, especially the mindless social leadership that has allowed earth's population to reach such proportions.

Consequently, Silverberg's dystopian novel does not create the sense of intellectual excitement and conflict that readers have found in Huxley's and Orwell's classic works. The climactic moments in *Brave New World* and *1984* come when an intelligent rebel against a repressive social order confronts the spokesman for the system: when the Savage encounters Mustapha Mond or Winston Smith meets the party overlords there are dramatic revelations of opposing views. Silverberg focuses on several dissidents, but none seems especially strong. Moreover, in Silverberg's novel, the climactic rebellion is a very different one: it is the defiant act of Michael Statler, who leaves the urban complex and goes into the "world outside" where he lives close to a farming commune and encounters the world of nature. In one of the major symbolic actions of the book, Michael bathes in an irrigation canal, a symbolic baptism that embodies an initiation into a new relationship

with nature. Curiously, however, Statler's love for his sister—another case of the romantic incest motif that appears in several Silverberg novels of this period—draws him back to the “Urbmon,” where his futile act of individual revolt is punished by the swift termination of his life.

Hence, Silverberg's novel is quite inferior to the dystopian classics of Huxley and Orwell in important respects. While repeating some of the patterned action of those works, *The World Inside* lacks the excitement of intellectual satire and the clash of opposing ideas that we enjoy in those works. No doubt, of course, all dystopian novels are actually satires on popular ideas and social trends of the time when they are written. It is, for instance, generally acknowledged that Huxley was actually satirizing behaviorism, Freudianism, and scientism; and that Orwell, likewise, was satirizing Stalinism and government lying and technological surveillance. However, Silverberg's novel does not appear to attack or satirize significant ideas of the sixties and seventies. To be sure, conformity and the governmental exploitation of a creed combining sex and religion are subjected to ridicule, but such targets generally invite attack.

In an effort to compensate for the novel's flaws, Frank Dietz suggests in a recent essay (RSMT 95–106) that its weaknesses are inherent in the genre of dystopian fiction. This point is arguable, but Dietz's case becomes an ingenious exercise in special pleading when he contends that Silverberg intended to write a “metadystopian work” that would “expose the shortcomings of this genre” (RSMT 104). In this view, Silverberg was actually writing a sophisticated “parody” of dystopian fictions, and his dystopian world is an “ambiguous” one, comparable to parallel works of the same period by Ursula LeGuin (*The Dispossessed*) and Joanna Russ (*The Female Man*). Dietz also contends, rather foolishly, that dystopian works are based on “implicit utopian visions” and “display a trust in stable solutions and an unchanging human nature” (RSMT 104).

Such arguments attempt to evade the seriousness of Silverberg's satire. In reality, Silverberg in *The World Inside* was attempting to renew the conventions of dystopian fiction and attack serious evils—an overcrowded earth, lack of personal freedom, socialized human stupidity. There is nothing particularly ambiguous about the evils of the world of the Urbmon Monads, and one does not need utopian visions to believe that human life can be more rewarding under other conditions. Moreover, we only need to glance at Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* to see that a dystopian novel need not be weakened by inherent conventions. The strength of Atwood's fine novel refutes Dietz's arguments about the weaknesses of the dystopian genre, and reduces his argument to the banal level of the chattering academics in the Epilogue to *The Handmaid's Tale*, who are unconcerned with serious comment on the experiences of Atwood's heroine.

We should note that *The World Inside* does employ a consistent and coherent pattern of symbolism. The Urbmon towers are symbols of human folly and pretension, much as Simeon Krug's gigantic tower functions as a

symbol of human arrogance in *Tower of Glass*. The book also abounds in sterility symbols of various sorts, a characteristic feature of dystopian novels. By a clever ironic paradox Silverberg presents both conception and birth as symbols of sterility here, because they add to an already intolerable situation. Yet despite some strengths, *The World Inside* remains a minor work; at best it is merely another epigone of *Brave New World* and *1984*, like Philip José Farmer's *The Lovers* and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, and it has the misfortune of being duller than either.

Although the Urbmon solution to the problem of overcrowding and exhaustion of the earth's resources had provided an inviting satirical target, Silverberg turned in *The Second Trip* (1972) to suspense melodrama to criticize another proposed panacea for society's ills—the use of drugs and behavioral conditioning to rehabilitate criminals. Here Nat Hamlin, an amoral sculptor who had committed murder a few years ago, is given a new personality as Paul Macy, a gentle, handsome “holovision” commentator for a major communications network. The anti-social ego of Hamlin is supposedly submerged under the persona of Macy, but the hidden and repressed Hamlin plots to seize control of Macy's will, avenge himself on his former lover, Lissa (now Macy's significant other), and resume a life of crime while masquerading as Macy. The Hamlin self does indeed gain control of Macy's will, but is eventually conquered when Macy unexpectedly uses his own deceit.

Silverberg presents this novel as a smoothly written futuristic suspense tale, somewhat in the mode of Philip K. Dick, with Macy's embattled psyche the real center of the action, rather than the suburbia in Florida where the story ostensibly takes place. The conflict between Macy and Hamlin may easily be interpreted as a study of the battle between the Freudian ego and id, or the Jungian ego and shadow. However, such interpretations do not necessarily make the novel stronger because the characters involved in the novel's psychological conflict have not been given sufficient credibility. It seems unlikely that Hamlin and Macy could occupy the same psyche in an unintegrated state, and Lissa's involvement with both characters requires a remarkable “suspension of disbelief.” Moreover, the moral issues involved are perhaps more complex than *The Second Trip* suggests.

Clearly, *The Second Trip* has been influenced by Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), and, despite its provisionally happy ending, it seems to offer an equally cautionary view of psychological conditioning—which is also one of the evils (on a larger scale) of *The World Inside*. However, *The Second Trip* appears to be merely a clever exercise on the subject, without the memorable characters and vigorous language of Burgess's classic novel.

The most impressive of Silverberg's novels of social concern is the celebrated *Dying Inside* (1972). To call this novel a work in the tradition of social realism may at first seem illogical, since the narrative is told entirely

from the point of view of the introverted and alienated telepath David Selig. This novel combines the science fiction tradition of the telepath with the anguish of the modernist novel of social alienation, stemming from the work of Feodor Dostoyevsky and Franz Kafka. It is especially influenced by the flowering of the American Jewish novel in the fifties and sixties with Bernard Malamud (*The Assistant, A New Life*), Saul Bellow ("Seize the Day," *Herzog*), and Philip Roth (*Goodbye, Columbus, Portnoy's Complaint*). These two traditions are splendidly compounded to produce an original work that has been regarded as a masterpiece—although a few critics, greatly impressed by the realism of *Dying Inside*, have sometimes raised the question of whether *Dying Inside* is actually a work of science fiction. With an impressive feat of the creative imagination, Silverberg envisioned social alienation and existential isolation, which, paradoxically, convey a vivid sense of the social anguish of the lonely and dispossessed in late sixties New York.

In making his protagonist, David Selig, a telepath of limited abilities, Silverberg produced a realistic novel that draws on science fiction tradition to offer an ironic parody of that tradition, as I have suggested elsewhere (RSMT 39–57). In earlier science fiction, telepaths had been people with a special "wild talent," and the telepath was either depicted as a potential superman, burdened by handicaps as in Olaf Stapledon's philosophic *Odd John* (1935) and A. E. Van Vogt's epic melodrama *Slan* (1940 magazine publication; 1946) or as a component in a supposedly emergent higher humanity (the "gestalt" group in Theodore Sturgeon's provocative *More than Human* [1953]).

Stapledon's *Odd John*, a tragic story (in intention at least) of a mutant prodigy struggling against conventional English society, provides the most obvious influential precursor to Silverberg's mutant protagonist, David Selig. Silverberg has acknowledged the importance of Stapledon's work on his early reading, calling it "the quintessential peculiar-little-boy book, a haunting and tragic tale of a child prodigy" (RR 147). In fact, both Silverberg the author and his character David Selig are examples of the talented "child prodigy," and the close parallel between David's experience and Silverberg's is a major reason for the power and intensity of *Dying Inside*. However, unlike Stapledon's *Odd John*, David does not find a group of similarly talented social "misfits" nor is he able to establish a community of them (or even join a community of like-minded thinkers, as Silverberg gained admission to the community of science fiction writers).

Instead, David Selig is a classic depiction of the suffering "schlemiel" or victim figure of modernist literature, and in particular American Jewish modernist fiction. David's relationship with his family resembles that of Kafka protagonists, particularly his conflicts with his sister, and his retreat from society suggests in some ways the fate of Gregor Samsa in Kafka's "The Metamorphosis." Indeed, the spirit of Kafka is invoked in one of the term papers David ghostwrites for another student (an actual term paper Silver-

berg had written at Columbia, according to the author), as David works at a career that makes him another invisible man, to use Wells's metaphor for the misunderstood and neglected genius. Although David does not imagine himself turned into a giant insect, he has become a completely anonymous "underground man" (to borrow Dostoyevsky's metaphor), both in his personal life and in his professional role as an academic criminal who helps plagiarizing students present fraudulent work. However, it is David's singular gifts and his moral sensitivity that have helped to alienate him.

Yet one of the high achievements of Silverberg's novel arises from the fact that David's gift, the ability to overhear the thoughts of others, helps him to perceive and empathize with other forms of human anguish. Too often, the underground man, the alienated anti-hero of modernist fiction, may seem to be too consumed by self-pity over his tragic predicament (as is perhaps the case with Bellow's Tommy Wilhelm in "Seize the Day"); but Selig's ability to hear the thoughts of others assures his awareness of the general human suffering in the urban wasteland of the New York he inhabits. In fact, *Dying Inside* uses a situation that is the reverse of *The Man in the Maze*: in the latter, others cannot bear the protagonist's telepathic projection of his own emotions; but in *Dying Inside*, the emotions of others add to the protagonist's anguish.

This difference makes *Dying Inside* a much finer novel. Silverberg's work is a model of sustained irony, capped by an appropriately humiliating climax for David with his exposure as a ghostwriter and the gradual waning of his gift. Unlike the super telepaths of science fiction precursors, David is unable to help humanity with his gift, other than by telling his bitter story. There is no need for further discussion of *Dying Inside* here; readers interested in a longer analysis of the novel may consult my essay, "An Ironic Parody of the Superman Myth" (RSMT 39-58). Here, we merely need to recognize that *Dying Inside* presents the anguish of the isolated self lost in modern urban life. David finally accepts life as an ordinary human, but he has lost the hope of finding personal fulfillment or playing the role of a messianic figure for society.

In 1971, Silverberg's writing had begun to decrease in quantity while generally improving in quality, as he set higher and higher standards for himself. As he has acknowledged, the ironic vision of *Dying Inside* and *The Book of Skulls* seemed to have been pushed to its limits with "Born with the Dead."⁸ Moreover, the religious and visionary passion that began with *Nightwings* also seemed to be losing force and giving way to the tragic tone of *A Time of Changes*.

However, Silverberg still had not found a way through the labyrinth of politics and history, and a retreat to mysticism had not provided a satisfactory fictional solution. In the two final novels of his third period, he directly confronted the central problem that haunts his fiction in 1971-74: the role

of the talented individual and his moral responsibility in the labyrinth of history. The first of these, *The Stochastic Man* (1975), breaks new ground but finally reaffirms the irony of *Dying Inside*. However, Silverberg's final novel of this period, *Shadrach in the Furnace* (1976), gathers together many of the themes of social concern of the third period, while redefining the role of the alienated individual. Here Silverberg would again describe his characters' anguish about the human prospect, but he would move beyond despair to a qualified confidence in the human capacity to survive.

First, however, *The Stochastic Man* was to repeat the pattern of tragic irony that pervades *Dying Inside*, *The Book of Skulls*, and much of the shorter fiction. In *The Stochastic Man*, Silverberg returns to one of the themes of *Dying Inside*, the ironic condition of the person with a "wild talent" that makes him superior to the social conformist and thereby alienates him from his fellows, yet leaves him unable to help society. As we have noted, this theme is another version of the modernist view of the artist that has dominated literature since the time of Poe, Hawthorne, and Baudelaire, and looms large in twentieth-century poetry and fiction.

Silverberg's protagonist in *The Stochastic Man* is Lew Nichols—a seer who finds it hard to accept his peculiar gift. At first, Nichols is merely a computer wizard who projects probabilities about the future; but after meeting Martin Caravajal, an eccentric recluse, Nichols begins to discover that he himself has the gift of "second sight," and he becomes the "stochastic man." The setting is again the end of the twentieth century (a period of confusion and uncertainty in many Silverberg works, such as *The Masks of Time* and "Thomas the Proclaimer"), and Nichols has been aiding a New York politician, Paul Quinn, in the latter's rise to national prominence. Quinn is another of the Kennedy-style liberals who appear in the final decade of the century and arouse the hopes of younger voters. Nichols learns that Quinn, behind his veneer of liberalism, is ruthless and amoral, and Quinn begins to view Nichols with antipathy when Quinn discovers that his aide has the ability to predict unlikely events.

The irony of the novel lies in Nichols's growing sense of impotence and horror as he realizes that his power to foretell the future does not include the ability to prevent misfortune or change reality. Hence Nichols finally finds himself in a position similar to the mythic Cassandra: he is able to foresee events accurately, but few will believe him, or use his predictions to influence the course of history.

Consequently, Nichols finds that his knowledge of the future is a curse. Foreseeing that Quinn, whom he has come to detest, will be elected to the presidency, Nichols knows his administration will disillusion his followers. Thus, like David Selig in *Dying Inside*, Nichols finds that the burden of his gift outweighs its benefits: to be a seer is to live with a knowledge that destroys hope.

Despite its ironic ending, *The Stochastic Man* is a novel that deserves to be more highly respected than it has been. As Clareson comments, the novel marks a movement forward from “the depths of Selig’s anguish” (RS 69), since political action is assumed to have some meaning. Silverberg’s handling of the political issues and struggles in the novel is quite competent, and his description of 1990s social life is well imagined. In fact, novels like *The Masks of Time* and *The Stochastic Man* suggest that Silverberg might have been one of America’s more durable mainstream novelists of conventional realism and social satire.

Since *Shadrach in the Furnace* was not published until 1976 and did not appear in paperback until 1978, its impact on readers was somewhat delayed; and its importance in Silverberg’s canon has been obscured by Silverberg’s more widely praised ironic works of the early seventies. Its appearance during a time when Silverberg was in temporary retirement and sometimes voicing his displeasure with the shallowness and superficiality of science fiction may also have hampered the reception of the book. Consequently, the novel’s worth and significance have not yet been fully recognized. As we shall see, *Shadrach in the Furnace* closes out Silverberg’s third period with a renewal of hope.

The novel is set in yet another grim future, the twenty-first century after biological warfare has devastated the planet and reduced it to a shambles. The earth is now dominated by a shaky empire ruled by a Mongolian despot, “the Khan,” who has taken the symbolic name of Genghis Mao. A ruthless brain in a dying body, Genghis Mao is kept alive by life support systems, but his fertile mind and iron will control the earth, with the help of a frightened but efficient corps of administrators and their sophisticated electronic surveillance. This elite class is protected by antidotes from the ravages of the “organ rot” bacteria that flourish throughout the world, and is given many luxuries and *divertissements* to distract them and ease their consciences over the condition of the world. However, they live in a world of paranoia because of the Khan’s secret police and his unpredictable caprices. Separated from ordinary humanity by age, disease, and the possession of supreme power, Genghis Mao is a grotesque tyrant who may remind us of narratives of the bizarre rule of Josef Stalin at its worst.

In short, the novel returns to the apocalyptic mood of *Unfamiliar Territory*; its title and main metaphor are taken from Daniel, the most apocalyptic book of the Old Testament. At the center of the conflict is a young idealistic African American doctor, Shadrach Mordecai (one of science fiction’s first black heroes), whose knowledge and skill are devoted to keeping Genghis Mao alive. Through one of his lovers, however, Shadrach learns that Genghis Mao intends to have an operation that will transfer his brain into a younger body, thereby ensuring the autocrat of longer life and, since

the process may be infinitely repeatable, immortality. Not only will this idea frustrate the hopes of ambitious politicians and idealistic liberals waiting for the tyrant's death, but Shadrach also learns with a numbing shock that his own body will be the youthful shell the Khan will use for his transplanted brain.

From this point on, Shadrach's courage and idealism are subjected to a trial by fire. This period of testing clarifies his sense of reality. Tiring of amusements like the drug palaces that the affluent use to titillate and distract themselves, Shadrach takes a vacation to consider his options. During this leave, he travels around the ruined and ravaged twenty-first-century world, contemplating his own past, the nightmare of world history, and the tragic condition of the present population of earth, wasting away by diseases for which anti-toxins might be produced, if anyone in power cared or was willing to take risks. On this pilgrimage, Shadrach discovers that all people, except the protected elite, face reduced expectations of health and life.

Finally, the journey creates in Shadrach the will to escape his fate as he comes to realize that an enlightened leader can bring some aid for a suffering world. At last, he returns to the capital and decides on a bold stroke, reminiscent of Renaissance men of action. Probably an influence on the story here is a precedent noted by Silverberg in *The Golden Dream*, a history of the quest for El Dorado. In the conquest of Peru, the ruthless conquistador, Pizarro, seized control by the surprise move of capturing the Inca chieftain, and by commandeering the will of one man, he conquered a nation (TGD 32). Though Shadrach serves the cause of humanitarian idealism rather than exploitation, he follows a similar course. Performing an operation on Genghis Mao that enables Shadrach to induce at will an unbearable pain for the Khan, and then implanting the electronic control that produces the stimulus in his left hand, Shadrach gives himself mastery over the master of the world. By closing his left fist, he is able to produce an intolerable pain in nerve centers in Genghis's skull. Unable to resist such pressure for long, Genghis Mao must now follow Shadrach's orders, and any effort to change the situation may result in the Khan's own death.

Thus by a masterful trick Shadrach transforms himself from potential victim and slave into master, and he intends to use his newfound power for humanitarian purposes. His first action, once his authority over Genghis Mao is acknowledged by the Khan, is to set into motion a research project that may produce vaccines to be administered to immunize the treatable sector of the world's population. To be sure, it is too late to save most of the infected adults, but Shadrach can at least attempt to preserve and lengthen the lives of the children and the unborn.

This summary of the novel's action indicates that its plot is essentially a simple one; yet no recounting of the story's outline can suggest its richness of texture or the rewarding experience of reading this book. Silverberg's

style, for instance, is mature and restrained, rich in biblical and literary allusion, and distinguished by a masterful use of poetic image.

Equal to the commanding style are the characterizations in *Shadrach*, which are assured and masterful; but every secondary character is subordinated to the conflict between Shadrach and Genghis Mao, and in the final analysis, these two are perhaps the only ones that matter. Each is triumphantly realized and each serves as a foil for the other.

Genghis Mao is the embodiment of dehumanizing tyranny, yet he is a credible and sometimes even sympathetic human being. His name suggests an emperor known for inhuman oriental despotism, yet, ironically enough, the name was chosen by this absolute dictator himself upon his accession to power, presumably to inspire fear and awe. The Khan is an astute and ruthless Mongol, and all human beings are subordinated to his two ends in life: his desire to go on living as long as medical science and technology can sustain his life, and his equally monomaniac determination to have absolute dominance over the world. This despot is the sort of figure who arises in human history in times of chaos and instability, but such rulers justify their absolutism with the dubious claim that they have imposed a kind of order that makes possible a semblance of civilized social life. Though Genghis Mao offers health and stability only for a privileged group of intellectuals and administrators, he has been able to seize power because the "organ rot" war has reduced the Soviet Union and the Western democracies to weak and third-rate powers, allowing the People's Republic of China (or the Chinese empire, in Genghis Mao's hands) to move into the power vacuum.

Although Genghis Mao is in one sense a mythic nightmare monster like the biblical Nebuchadnezzar (which intensifies the strength of the characterization), he is not a cartoon villain, a return to the Fu Manchu archetype of the "yellow peril." Rather, he is a competent ruler with an idea of world order that every person is expected to respect. His age and bodily decrepitude make him almost an incorporeal intelligence that is alienated from the ordinary human passions and sentiments, not to mention the occasional moments of idealism that sometimes compensate in part for the flaws of powerful rulers. Since Genghis Mao intends to succeed himself after his brain is transplanted into a younger body, he even lacks the dynastic urge that usually inspires despotic conquerors to create a family and develop a modest sense of love and kindness. Even Shadrach, his young physician, whose skill eases his pain and keeps him alive, is only a means to an end for Genghis Mao. Although at times, the Khan seems to treat Shadrach with the kindness of a father viewing a talented son, this kindness is a mask for the contempt in which Genghis Mao holds other mortals. Nevertheless, Silverberg humanizes Genghis Mao by revealing his mind in several stream-of-consciousness passages that are impressively written. Finally, however, the Khan is "alien, mysterious, unfathomable, ultimately inscrutable," as Shad-

rach sees him (SITF 247). In short, Genghis Mao is a character who surpasses the sinister men of will in Silverberg's earlier fiction by becoming both a mythic archetype of the historical tyrant and a credible character in the mimetic mode of fiction.

Shadrach is also a well-developed character. It is not easy to make a virtuous and idealistic character come alive in fiction, and frequently such characters, even when credible, turn out to be fools or prigs who forfeit our sympathy. Shadrach, however, is characterized effectively as a genuinely humane protagonist—mainly through his growth during his struggle with his dilemma. If a moral idealist is capable of taking action in a complex historical situation, then what form should the action take? This question is Shadrach's problem, and it has never before been confronted quite so thoughtfully in Silverberg's fiction.

As a doctor, Shadrach is committed to a humanitarian creed that eschews violence, and as a young black man, he has sympathy for the oppressed, although his own background has been a fairly fortunate one. Yet his career has been a steady series of successes thus far, and his idealism has not before been subjected to a serious moral testing. As a member of the educated elite with a favored position in the Khan's government, Shadrach has found a place where he not only enjoys immunity from the world's diseases but is also—until he learns of the Khan's plans for his body—shielded from much of the world's suffering. Like other members of the Khan's administrative bureaucracy, Shadrach enjoys the privilege of belonging to a fortunate elite: he enjoys pleasures with his two female lovers and the diversions offered by the reconstructed pleasure city of Karakorom, like the drug-induced fantasies of the "transtemporalists" who can "transport" their clients to another time and place. Before being confronted with the threat of death, Shadrach moves between the poles of a moderate humanism and a restrained hedonism.

As a humanitarian doctor, Shadrach, the personal physician to Genghis Mao, is supposedly in a position that is not only enviable because of its rewards, but also from a moral point of view. For Shadrach only needs to practice his profession well and tend to the Khan's illnesses in order to carry out the commitments to his professional ethics and his own Christian creed.

However, the moral innocence of Shadrach's position turns out to be as illusory as his supposed security. When Shadrach learns of the Khan's plan to destroy him and take his body for himself, Shadrach can no longer avoid existential commitment or action. Yet the nature of the action may involve violation of Shadrach's principles.

Here, however, the novel moves beyond mere suspense melodrama by enlarging Shadrach's personal crisis to a concern for the anguish and suffering of the entire globe. The interweaving of these two themes is masterful. This expansion of the novel's conflict takes place during Shadrach's leave of absence, during which he goes on a world tour and visits its troubled

cities. His trip is in actuality a journey downward into the inferno or labyrinth of the world's suffering, as he sees the diseased wasting away from the blight of "organ rot," and discovers pity for the children whose hopes and life expectancies are limited. This descent into the sickness and anguish of the world is both a literal one and a symbolic act, suggesting the archetypal journey of a classical hero to the underworld. The emotional crisis of the novel is reached when Shadrach visits Jerusalem and meets the archetypal wandering Jew, Meschach Yakov, by the famous Wailing Wall. Here Shadrach seems to have come to the core of the world's anguish, and the writing becomes eloquent. At first, Shadrach has viewed Jerusalem with hope, as Silverberg describes it:

From his balcony he has a superb view of the old walled city. Awe and excitement rise in him as he looks out upon it. Those two glittering domes down there—his map tells him the huge gold one is the Dome of the Rock, on the site of Solomon's Temple, and the silver one is the Aqsa Mosque—and that formidable battlemented wall, and the ancient stone towers, and the tangle of winding streets, all speak to him of human endurance, of the slow steady tides of history, the arrivals and departures of monarchs and empires. The city of Abraham and Isaac, of David and Solomon, the city Nebuchadnezzar destroyed and Nehemiah rebuilt, the city of the Maccabees, of Herod, the city where Jesus suffered and died and rose from the dead, the city where Mohammed, in a vision, ascended into heaven, the city of the Crusaders, the city of legend, of fantasy, of pilgrimages, of conquests, of layer upon layer of event, layers deeper and more intricate than those of Troy—that little city of low buildings of tawny stone just across the swooping valley from him counsels him that apocalyptic hours are followed by rebirth and reconstruction, that no disaster is eternal. (SITF 194–195)

However, the actual experience of walking the streets and seeing the doomed but energetic children produces a sense of futility:

It is too much for Shadrach—the fierce children, the woeful staggerers, the dirt, the unfamiliar density of the populace that throngs this tiny walled city. There is no way to escape the overwhelming sadness of the place. He should never have entered it; it would have been better by far to look out from his hotel balcony and think romantic thoughts of Solomon and Saladin. (SITF 197)

His meeting with Meschach leads to a visit to Meschach's home, which is a turning point, reminding Shadrach of his biblical predecessor, for his despair begins to ebb in the warm communion of this experience. Moreover, it is Shadrach's sense of emptiness before the world's suffering that finally leads to his calm understanding not only of the need for action but also of what action to take.

By performing the operation that gives him power over the Khan's nerve centers, Shadrach makes himself the ruler of the world's master. This act is

one that requires existential courage as well as moral concern and discernment. Many of the alternatives might have seemed easier, but Shadrach's choice combines maximum social responsibility with minimum pain for others. By controlling the Khan, and hence the world order, Shadrach can have government-sponsored research direct itself to developing immunity for the children and trying to save the unborn.

To be sure, Shadrach recognizes that his situation at the novel's end is an ambiguous one: he has chosen to ride the tiger at the eye of the storm. Genghis Mao recognizes his own predicament with a rueful sense of amusement and seems almost relieved to have someone else take on the responsibility of rule. However, the Khan is an unpredictable force, and there are those in his government and in the world outside who plot mischief.

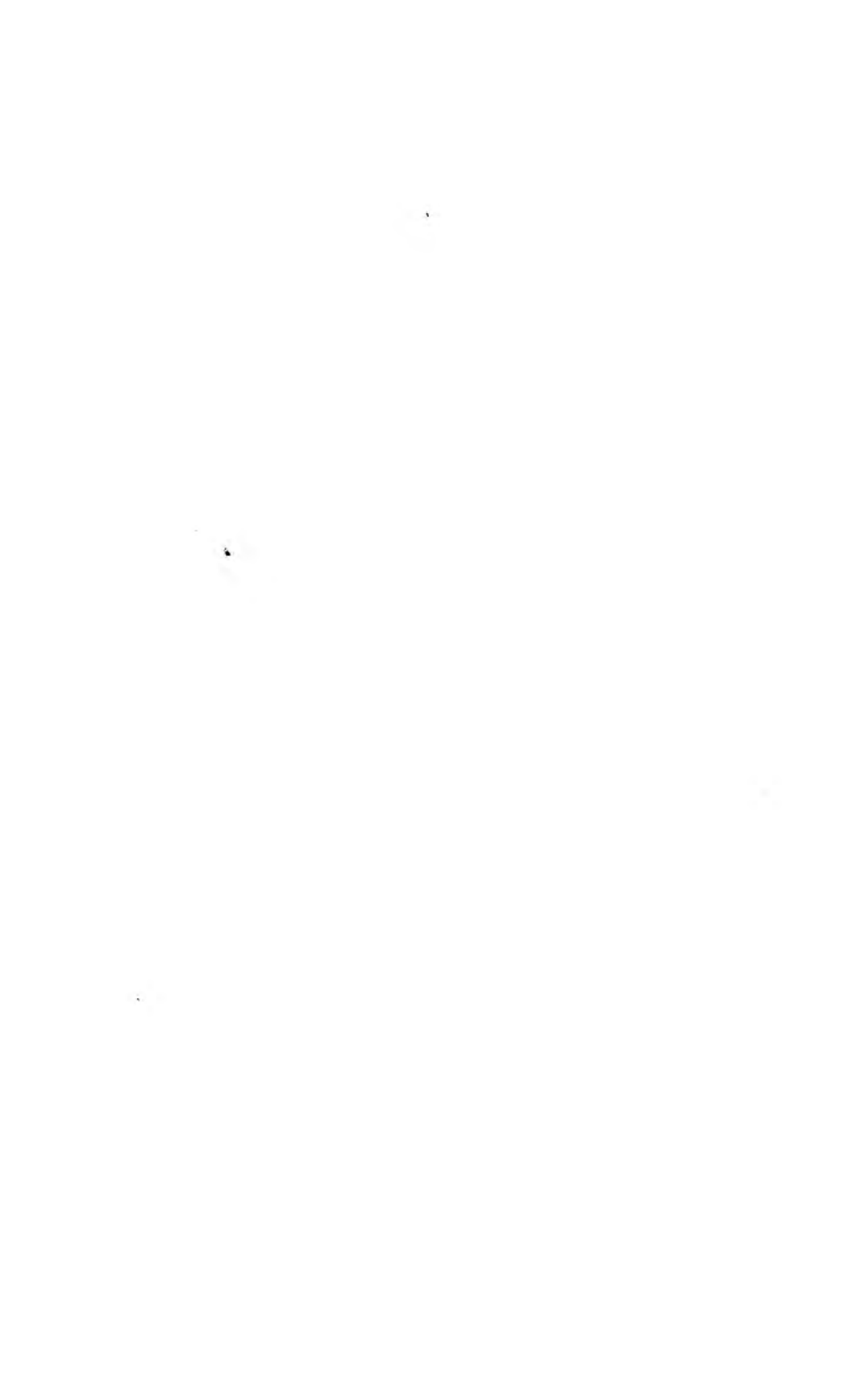
Nevertheless, at the novel's end, Shadrach feels a sense of elation, for "it is the fourth of July, 2012," and hence a day of liberation:

In this night death will travel the globe, harvesting his thousands; but in the morning, Shadrach Mordecai vows, things will begin to change. He stretches forth his left hand. He studies it as though it be a thing of precious jade, of rarest ivory. Tentatively he closes it, almost but not quite clenching his fist. He smiles. He touches the tips of his fingers to his lips and blows a kiss to all the world. (SITF 247)

Silverberg's hero has learned the harsh truth that there are in the end no safe places in a world of injustice and tyranny; but he has also come to know the complementary lesson that one need not be impotent, for there are always free and positive moral acts that one may take—if one has maturity and courage. Shadrach has walked through the furnace of his Nebuchadnezzar, and like his biblical namesake, has emerged unscathed. He stands ready to assume enormous power and its responsibilities, prepared by this ordeal. At the end, Shadrach is about to assume the burden first taken on by Roy Walton in the melodramatic *Master of Life and Death*, nearly two decades earlier. So Silverberg's fiction has come full circle, but Shadrach, unlike Walton, begins with an awareness of the frightening moral ambiguities of power, as well as its heavy responsibilities.

With *Shadrach in the Furnace*, Silverberg at last comes to a tentative acceptance of the anguish and moral ambiguities of human history. Despite the nightmare of history, moral idealism still has its value. As Clarkson has observed, the novel demonstrates that Silverberg's work has "abandoned the underworld of despair," for "its protagonist makes an affirmative answer so that he himself may shape the world in which he lives" (RS 71). Faced by a dilemma, the hero does not turn to a futile and destructive gesture of revolt, like that enacted by Thor Watchman in *Tower of Glass* or the characters in *The World Inside*. Instead, the hero makes a choice that reaffirms the dignity and value of action. *Shadrach in the Furnace* is a beautifully written novel, an impressive work concluding Silverberg's third period.

Both *The Stochastic Man* and *Shadrach in the Furnace* have been greatly underrated by those critics who have taken notice of them. Aldiss, for instance, while generally favorable, describes them as “somewhere between entertainment and insight” and seems to place them in the “second rank” of Silverberg’s novels (TYS 345). However, no other novels by Silverberg deserve to be recognized at their true worth. Indeed, *Shadrach in the Furnace* is arguably one of Silverberg’s finest works.



A Return to Romance: The Sorceries of Majipoor

After completing *Shadrach in the Furnace*, Silverberg took a welcome sabbatical from writing for about four years, before making a triumphant return with a handsome contract for *Lord Valentine's Castle*.¹ During this period of exile, some of his public statements described his weariness and disenchantment with the genre and its more uncritical readers.²

He seemed content to settle down quietly in the San Francisco Bay area and cultivate his garden. In particular, reader indifference to his fine ironic novels disappointed him. However, Silverberg later conceded that while the failure of his best work to win a wider audience was a major disappointment, his own reaction to this response may have been excessive.³ From the perspective of the eighties, it was easier for him to acknowledge that his remarkable flowering in the years of the third period—not to mention his labor on non-fiction books—had virtually exhausted his energies. He needed time to review his career and recharge his batteries.

Once before, Silverberg had abandoned the genre, in the period following 1959, after a strenuous apprenticeship that ended in frustration. His comments about that time reveal a sense of defeat, at least as far as his novels were concerned.⁴ This time, however, Silverberg's retirement was entirely different. He was leaving on top, as an acknowledged master with a considerable body of fine work, some of it already considered classics for the genre. His fiction had won the field's major awards, and he had assimilated the innovative techniques of the new experimental fiction. He now could claim with justice that his best writing had achieved a level of sophisticated irony

and technique that demanded too much intellectual intensity from the growing audience of science fiction readers.

However, no person with Silverberg's discipline and drive might be expected to be inactive for long. There were interviews to give and memoirs of his early career to write, and paperback publishers were interested in re-issuing the early novels. Silverberg could now contemplate these youthful efforts with an assured sense of superiority by writing thoughtful introductions for new editions. He was able to assemble early short stories, like *The Best of Robert Silverberg*, Volume 1 (1976) for Pocket Books. Later a second "best of" volume was edited for Gregg Press. Silverberg also continued to edit anthologies, another task he had undertaken in the sixties, and which he had carried out with distinction in the Alpha series for Ballantine Books, the New Dimensions series of original stories for a hardcover publisher, the *Science Fiction Hall of Fame* volume, and others.

In fables, a prince who, after some disappointments, is finally crowned as a monarch—and then abandons his throne—will eventually begin to wonder who he is. When he starts to remember, he may undertake the quest to regain his authority. In his subsequent work, Silverberg was to emulate Lord Valentine, the hero of his epic romance, in once more ascending to the throne. However, during his absence, decisive public events and significant changes in the genre and its audience had already made their impact. Mutations of the marketplace prepared the way for Silverberg's re-entry into the world of active science fiction writers with an impressive novel, *Lord Valentine's Castle*, a romantic saga that would inaugurate a new period in Silverberg's career.

When Silverberg returned to active fiction writing after his sabbatical (1975–78), it was to a marketplace that was enormously changed. If a large body of readers did not appreciate his finely crafted ironic stories, there were more defenders of the minority view that science fiction should be more concerned with the aesthetics of fiction and more accommodating to a pessimistic worldview. In addition, the gradual subsiding of the social unrest of the sixties and early seventies produced a more stable public atmosphere, if not a more just society.

The major change in the world of mass entertainment and publishing was new acceptance of science fiction by a mass audience, which the catalytic film *Star Wars* (1977), with its enormous commercial success, forced producers of film and television to recognize. Publishers had come to realize that the success of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* in paperback, and the growing readership for such authors as Robert Heinlein and Frank Herbert made science fiction of the romantic variety a good risk in hardcovers. Now, the *Star Wars* phenomenon, the continued popularity of "Star Trek" reruns, and the increasing success of such well written series as Philip José Farmer's Riverworld novels and Herbert's Dune saga made hardcover

publishers receptive to imaginative science fiction on an epic scale. Such conditions opened the way for Silverberg's elegant science fantasy *Lord Valentine's Castle*, the first of the Majipoor stories.

Characteristically, Silverberg's account of the genesis of *Lord Valentine's Castle* is modest. According to one interview, he attributes the book's conception to the atmosphere at a major science fiction convention in 1978, where there was much wheeling and dealing about contracts, a situation that aroused Silverberg's desire to test his worth in the open market. The result was a contract for, reportedly, \$175,000, a princely figure that made Silverberg's labors in his early pulp days seem absurd. Silverberg also says that the outline for *Lord Valentine's Castle* was "conceived" in an afternoon, but he concedes that he felt he had an idea for a book that "seemed quite irresistible" (DM 263). Although Silverberg wanted to reap the benefits of the booming market, it is clear that a powerful imaginative conception of the story came first.

Stimulated by the widening of the market and inspired by a fresh vision of a new fictional world, Silverberg produced in *Lord Valentine's Castle* a novel that is both an entertaining adventure story (which may be read as either science fiction or fantasy) and an imaginatively rich symbolic romance that may be read on a more sophisticated level. Technically speaking, *Lord Valentine's Castle* may be considered science fiction, since it takes place on a planet colonized by terrestrials many thousands of years in the future. However, for the purpose of discussing its meaning here, Brian Attebery's useful concept of "science fantasy" may help to define its nature. According to Attebery, "science fantasy" pretends to employ the rational explanations of science fiction, but it transcends the conventional limitations of that genre. Its story moves closer to the realm of heroic or demonic fantasy and its characters and plot tend to assume a more mythic or numinous character (SOF 105-125), if I read Attebery correctly.⁵

In the creation of his imaginary planet, Majipoor, Silverberg painted a large canvas, peopling three continents of this planet with humans and a number of other species, including the doglike Hjorts, the giant Skandars, the birdlike Vroons, with their wizard skills, not to mention the Liimen, the Ghayrogs, and the dispossessed Metamorphs, or "Shapeshifters," all credibly depicted. In addition, he provided Majipoor with a civilization of over fourteen thousand years of history, together with an elaborate system of world government—a constitutional monarchy—and a system of social rituals, folklore, and mythology. Of course, not all this is presented entirely in *Lord Valentine's Castle*, since an author needs some freedom for his imagination in future novels. However, Silverberg's fantasy is an impressive example in the subgenre of "planetary romance," a form described in David Pringle's article in John Clute's and John Grant's fine *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (705-706). This is a tradition as old as Burroughs; but only in the past three or four decades, with the maturation of science fiction and fantasy, has the

construction of invented planets been undertaken with the requisite seriousness and consistency.

However, if Majipoor is one of science fantasy's most sophisticated invented planets, we should not forget that there is a central theme underlying Silverberg's vast narrative: this is Valentine's quest to recover his lost identity and regain his position as ruling monarch. Indeed, the quest for identity is a central theme of *Lord Valentine's Castle*, as John Flodstrom has suggested in an essay ranging over Silverberg's work (RSMT 73-94). Unfortunately, Flodstrom presses his argument a bit too strongly when he tries to make the search for identity—under the aegis of “new age” ideas—the central theme of the first Majipoor trilogy, while neglecting the political and social issues of the books.

Nevertheless, Valentine's recovery of his identity, symbolized by his acquisition of the crown of the coronal is the major theme of *Lord Valentine's Castle*. However, there are several contrapuntal themes, all interwoven in the tale of Valentine's achievement of his enormous task.

To begin with, before his loss of power, Valentine had been a naive and inexperienced young man, without understanding of ordinary people and their lives. His adventures after his change of body and loss of memory begin when he assumes the role of an itinerant juggler and learns to appreciate and enjoy the carefree—but often troubled—lot of an itinerant entertainer. This theme might be called the rediscovery of common existence.

A related theme is the need for humility before one assumes power. As the later *Majipoor Chronicles* shows, Valentine had not planned to be coronal, and he had only succeeded to the throne because of his dominating elder brother's unexpected death. Before his fall Valentine had been a proud and overconfident young man, distant from his people and sure of his ability to rule. His long road back to power is a lesson in humility.

Yet another theme is the gradual recovery of identity after it has been mysteriously lost. At the beginning, Valentine is a wanderer without memory and hence without identity. His rediscovery of self does not occur until after he has achieved a new identity and self-esteem, resulting from his mastery of juggling. Yet even after Valentine learns his true identity as the chosen coronal from The Lady of oracular wisdom on the Isle of Sleep, his resumption of his older self is gradual and difficult.

Still another theme that plays a major role in the earlier sections of the novel is the discovery of friendship and romantic love. Without friends and memory at the beginning of the novel, Valentine is a lonely figure who has forgotten whatever he knew of the joys of childhood and youth. Yet he discovers companionship and fellowship with the traveling group of entertainers. Although this experience is not without tensions, it proves to be one of the most important lessons learned by the mature Valentine.

Romantic love also plays an important role in *Lord Valentine's Castle*, especially in the first half. Curiously enough, romantic or erotic love is not

a significant element in many of the more celebrated modern fantasy novels. Valentine's discovery of romantic love with Carabella is credibly described, and the strongly sexual nature of this relationship is handled quite directly, without appeals to either prurience or sensationalism. In fact, it is a measure of the maturity that science fiction and fantasy have achieved that the erotic relationship between Valentine and Carabella is handled with such assurance.

Then, too, another important theme of the novel, and perhaps its most significant one, is the concern with the fulfillment of talent and destiny. Valentine begins his new existence as a juggler, a man with gifts of acrobatic dexterity and hand/eye coordination, but he soon proves that his intelligence and political talents are extraordinary. Implicit in the description of his adventures is the question: What is the proper use of one's talents? For a time, Valentine is content to be merely a popular entertainer, but he is driven on to new trials, new marvels, and mastery over new situations, until at last he has forced the usurping coronal off Castle Mount and assumed his rightful role as ruler. Valentine's final strategy against the usurper is, interestingly enough, called "a gigantic kind of juggle" (LVC 42). Here juggling has become synonymous with political adroitness.

Moreover, juggling may be a metaphor for all forms of skill or artistry, and it is not at all perverse to see Valentine as a symbolic figure representing the artist, in addition to the obvious interpretation of him as an archetype of the metaphysical quester. Silverberg's epic novel then becomes, on this reading, a study of the artist's progress through experience to a position of social responsibility and leadership—an interesting contrast to major twentieth-century literary traditions that see the artist as perennially doomed to opposition to society.

Finally, another obvious interpretation of Silverberg's novel is to see it as a metaphoric description of the experience of Silverberg as author. In some respects, Silverberg's literary career resembles Valentine's political career. After boyhood, Silverberg, a youth blessed with extraordinary verbal talents, first chose to make his living by his prodigious production of formula science fiction. His career at this time was largely that of a clever entertainer, like Valentine with his juggling act. Yet, like Valentine, Silverberg could not be content to be a mere professional showman, and the middle and later stages of his career parallel Valentine's effort, as Silverberg has sought to reclaim his birthright and assert his identity as a true prince of the realm of literature. In this allegorical interpretation, then, *Lord Valentine's Castle*, though written in a luminously objective style, may be considered one of Silverberg's most personal novels. Indeed, it may be one of his central works, which looks back to his earlier career, and points forward to later works.

An analysis of *Lord Valentine's Castle* can conveniently follow Silverberg's own divisions of the story. In the first section, "The Book of the King of

Dreams," Valentine confronts his loss of identity, finding himself alone on the continent of Zimroel near the city of Pidruid, a man without memory or identity. Yet his possession of some past is subtly emphasized in Silverberg's first sentence:

And then, after walking all day through a golden haze of humid warmth that gathered about him like fine wet fleece, Valentine came to a great ridge of out-cropping white stone overlooking the city of Pidruid. (LVC 3)

Not only does the opening take us immediately into Valentine's consciousness, but the casual use of "And" at the start of this sentence emphasizes a mysterious history behind the present action.

Valentine's loss of identity through amnesia is a classic archetypal motif of romance narratives throughout literature, although the transformation of his body resembles specific metamorphoses from the magic world of Greco-Roman romance and medieval folk tale. In his study of the characters and structure of romance, *The Secular Scripture*, Northrop Frye calls Valentine's mortal state the "motif of amnesia" or the "break in consciousness," which provides the impetus to action in many fantasy romances. This event is accompanied by a "sharp descent in social status, from riches to poverty, from privilege to a struggle to survive, or even slavery" (104). Such a descent "from a higher world to a lower one," which Frye finds commonplace in the beginning of romances has as "the structural core . . . the individual loss or confusions or break in the continuity of identity," an action that Frye suggests parallels the entering of a dream world (104-105).

Thus, "The Book of the King of Dreams" opens with Valentine wandering outside Pidruid like a sleepwalker, and throughout this first book, Valentine seems to be meandering through a world where dream and reality intermingle. As Valentine finds a footloose existence among the entertainers, he gradually recovers consciousness and self-awareness, and the book ends with his nightmare encounter with the King of Dreams, where Valentine recognizes that he has indeed fallen from his former role as coronal. However, the events of this first book deserve further comment.

The first chapter, for instance, describing Valentine's meeting with the boy herdsman, Shanamir, touches very lightly on the theme of Valentine's fall from power and loss of identity. In a casual conversation, Shanamir discusses the visit of the coronal to Pidruid and the accompanying midsummer festival, and the contrast between the supposedly authentic Lord Valentine and the homeless hero is subtly emphasized.

In the first book, too, Valentine's free, if impoverished, state compels him to discover his talent as a juggler, join the fellowship of the entertainers, and consummate his love for Carabella. Each of these actions is important, but perhaps the most significant is the discovery of his talent. It is quickly established that Valentine possesses a great gift for juggling, but "no form"

(LVC 21). Talent must be schooled by discipline until mastery is achieved, according to Sleet, Carabella's partner, and this lesson is obviously meant to have a wider application than merely to the art of tossing objects in the air.

Very early, Sleet identifies the attainment of mastery of one's talent with the achievements of self-mastery and of personal unity: "Cleanse your mind of all needless thought and calculation. Travel to the center of your being and hold yourself there" (LVC 32). Later in the novel, self-mastery for a ruler is also described by the metaphor of "movement to the center" of one's being.

Most of Book 1 takes place in the atmosphere of relaxed awareness that goes with dream and reverie. In contrast to the discovery of love, fellowship, and the mastery of an art, the theme of Valentine's lost identity begins to emerge in his troubled dreams, especially the evil dreams traditionally sent from Majipoor's sinister King of Dreams.

Book 1 contains several disturbing dreams, but none so vivid as Valentine's final nightmare. Just before, Carabella has experienced her own nightmare, and she awakes, troubled, to proclaim that her dream has revealed that Valentine is indeed the true coronal, though cheated of his throne by some trickery. Valentine's response is to deny her astonishing claim; but Carabella's insistence on the oracular power of her dream leaves him shaken, and soon he discusses the idea with Deliamber, the sorcerer, who concedes that such an incredible transformation and usurpation could be possible. This sequence sets the stage for Valentine's own prophetic dream.

This climactic event is an impressive surreal fantasy. In his dream, Valentine juggles at the palace of the King of Dreams, and is subjected to a ritual of mockery by the King and his sons, who inform him that his identity has been stolen. Their ridicule includes the contemptuous remarks that Valentine was "lazy," "cowardly," and "a shirker of duty," all epithets restating the theme of Valentine's original lack of readiness to assume the responsibility that goes with power. Ironically, it is this meeting with his psychological adversary that convinces Valentine at last of his fall from great estate; moreover, the mockery of his enemies motivates Valentine to plan his careful and slow recovery of power.

Several of the characters Valentine encounters exude a numinous or mythic aura, starting with the King of Dreams, who is revealed at the end of the novel as the real force behind the usurper. Indeed, this character plays the traditional role assigned to Satan or Loki in mythologies of the past: he is a demonic being who dominates evil dreams and sows discord, an archetypal betrayer and deceiver. In terms of Jungian theory, the King of Dreams is the ultimate shadow archetype, the force behind the usurping coronal, who may be seen as Valentine's shadow self.⁶ Indeed *Lord Valentine's Castle*, like all mythic romances that resemble naive romance or fairy tales, is rich in images and symbols that yield readily to a Jungian interpretation. As in

many classic romances, Valentine's initial confrontation with the shadow is decisive: the encounter persuades him to pursue his destiny.

Book 2, "The Book of the Metamorphs," describes Valentine on the next stage of his quest. At the climax of this book, he confronts a revelation about his identity in an encounter with the Shapeshifters, or Metamorphs, at their festival of mockery when they mimic the jugglers. The action closes on an increasingly tense note when Valentine and his friends are attacked by the Metamorphs, and after defeating them, they become separated and their boats are wrecked in the rapids of the Zimr. For a time, Valentine is left with nothing but his own resources to sustain him.

As in Book 1, Valentine is haunted by dreams in this book, but many are beneficent dreams sent from The Lady, the Queen of the Isle of Sleep, whose importance increases dramatically. She represents the archetypal "Great Mother" in Jungian terms, and her role is benevolent.⁷ These encouraging dreams accompany a growing sense of identity, as Valentine demonstrates an increasing mastery of juggling and new qualities of leadership. By the end of the book, Valentine is both a master performer and the acknowledged leader of the entertainers.

In general, the ordeals that Valentine undergoes in this book represent the motif of "descent to a lower world" that Frye designates as a central theme of romance narratives (SS 97-126). The Metamorphs resemble demons, or defeated titans of myth, who lurk close to the land and seek their revenge on the dominant culture or civilization, like those "subterranean titans" that, Frye contends, "persist through all romance" (SS 112). Their demonic masque brings Valentine to a confrontation with his double, or doppelgänger, the false Lord Valentine, and their fierce attack on the traveling fellowship threatens death and dismemberment, a menace akin to the ritualized nightmare situations of classic romances. As Book 2 concludes, Valentine, embarking on a perilous journey by water—a traditional ordeal for the hero—is thrown ashore alone, temporarily separated from his companions, and shaken by a sense of cosmic loneliness as well as by a recognition of his quest.

Book 2 is notable for the hallucinatory power of Valentine's dreams. In an early dream, he envisions his mother, The Lady of the Isle of Sleep, but her face is veiled, and she will not look at him. Obviously, winning recognition from her is an important challenge for Valentine. A second major dream depicts a journey to the labyrinth to interview the Pontifex, or supreme ruler of Majipoor. This dream ends in a nightmarish scene when the Pontifex, supposedly the source of wisdom, justice, and final authority, appears to be insane and inhuman. (Later it is revealed that the Pontifex is merely aged and incompetent, unable to play a role in the political maneuvering.)

Shortly afterward, Valentine experiences another important dream, one that reveals how his identity was stolen and his position usurped. This time the dream, though unpleasant, has the oracular power of a true "sending," and it prepares Valentine for the recognition of his true self that occurs in the demonic masque of the Shapeshifters. Thus Valentine's journey through actual perils is counterpointed by a vivid odyssey through dreamland.

Continuing the description of prophetic dreams and nightmarish perils, the third book of *Lord Valentine's Castle*, "The Book of the Isle of Sleep," is an adroit exercise in narrative skill. At the opening, Valentine is apparently abandoned and alone. Within a few pages, he rejoins his companions and the quest continues. Their progress takes them to the Isle of Sleep, one of those enchanted islands that are a central archetype of romance and fantasy, from Circe's island in Homer and Prospero's island in *The Tempest* to the enchanted islands in twentieth-century fantasies.

Generally, in romance narratives, islands of enchantment are ambiguous places. They may be scenes of trial or temptation, as with Circe's island or "The Bower of Bliss" in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (Book 2, Canto 12); but successful passage through the trial or enchantment may strengthen the hero. On the other hand, the enchanted island may be one ruled by a benevolent magus or sorceress, as with Prospero's island; but it is wise to remember that even an island under the influence of white magic may appear mysterious, frightening, and ambiguous at first. So it is with this Isle of Sleep, ruled by Valentine's true mother, a benevolent enchantress who also happens to be an earth mother archetype, a wise tutelary figure comparable to Athena in *The Odyssey*. To emphasize the enchanted nature of the Isle of Sleep, Silverberg makes the journey there perilous, for the voyager must pass through seas afflicted by "sea-dragons." Thus, as often happens in romances with a strong fairy tale basis, the "great sacred place" is guarded by watchful monsters, archetypal symbols of terror. Likewise, the hero and a companion suffer a ritual immersion into horror, when Valentine and Lisamon Hultin are actually swallowed by the great sea-dragon in the last attack on the ship and spend time in its belly before being regurgitated into the Inner Sea. This ordeal, like many others, serves a purpose: it leads Valentine to reflect on mortality and the meaning of life.

Here again, Silverberg's epic makes use of a ritualized romance motif, "the swallowing of a youth or maiden by a subterranean or submarine monster," to use Frye's words (SS 118). All Valentine's ordeals, to this point, may be said to coalesce into the larger theme of the archetypal descent motif in romance, which in Frye's formulation is described as "the descending hero or heroine . . . going down into a dark and labyrinthine world of caves and shadows which is also either the bowels or belly of an earth-monster, or the womb of an earth-mother, or both" (SS 119). His reunion with

friends and Carabella and his visit to the Isle of Sleep begin a counter-movement of ascent toward Valentine's rightful position. To be sure, the motif of ascent of Castle Mount is presented as a tortuous climb, and on his way upward, Valentine must pass through numerous ordeals.

On the Isle of Sleep, Valentine is subjected to a sacred atmosphere, where he undergoes various rituals that produce purification and discipline. The hallowed character of the Isle is emphasized by the series of terraces and temples that rise upward and dominate the island, as well as by other features. This setting alone receives the description of "holy place" in the novel (LVC 273). Moreover, it is notable that the seaport of the Isle is called "Numinor," an evocative name also suggesting the presence of the sacred or holy by its close approximation to the word "numinous," the word coined by Rudolph Otto to describe the experience of awe or "holy dread" in his classic *The Idea of the Holy*.⁸

For much of his time on the Isle of Sleep, Valentine does not experience mystic epiphanies, but rather submits to a series of mundane initiations and a time of patient waiting. The chief incentive to continue his discipleship is the presence of recurring dreams where he becomes more and more familiar with his mother, The Lady of the Isle, and seeks to win her favor.

However, it is not until Valentine takes the initiative that he earns his crucial meeting with The Lady. First there comes the summoning dream, more vivid and intense than the other dreams Valentine has been experiencing. However, the priests, his mentors, are indifferent to the summoning dream, and instead instruct Valentine to return to the coast as a guide for newly landed pilgrims. Angry and chagrined, Valentine at last seizes the initiative and takes control of his own destiny.

Ultimately Valentine is rewarded in a scene in which his mother grants him full recognition and provides the healing act of restoring his memory completely. The point of this sequence should be obvious. Silverberg suggests that at some point mere obedience to a religious discipline is not enough. There is a time when the quest hero must take matters into his own hands and follow the call of his destiny.

However, even more important that Valentine's recovery of his past, through his communion with The Lady, is the charge that The Lady gives him for his future. Until now, Valentine has not been fully committed to a recovery of his throne, for he is still in love with his old carefree life as a juggler and wanderer. However, The Lady urgently insists that the rule of the usurper will be harmful and destructive:

The Barjazid does not yet rule as an absolute tyrant, for that might turn the people against him, and he is still insecure in his power—while you live. But he rules for himself and for his family, not for Majipoor. He lacks a sense of right, and does only what seems useful and expedient. As his confidence grows, so too will his crimes, until Majipoor groans under the whip of a monster. (LVC 304)

Fortunately, Valentine's humanity and The Lady's vision do not permit them to contemplate a violent and bloody progress to the throne. Instead, Valentine is enjoined to become a supreme master of guile, a trickster with humane values, and to aid him The Lady bestows on him a talisman or magic gift, similar to those given to mortals in fairy tales and myth: the silver circlet that endows its possessor with telepathic powers. From this point on, Valentine becomes a more resourceful and dominating hero, and his successful progress to the top of Castle Mount seems assured.

Book 4, "The Book of the Labyrinth," depicts Valentine on an upward ascent, despite the title, which seems to suggest further imagery of descent. This book, the shortest in the novel, concerns Valentine's journey to a meeting with the aged and ineffectual Pontifex to gain his support for Valentine's projected overthrow of the usurper. The book is unified by three motifs: Valentine's emergence as a masterful manipulator who uses guile rather than force to overcome his enemies; the image of the government bureaucracy as a vast labyrinth that must be circumvented by trickery; and Valentine's final meeting with the Pontifex, a senile ruler and a benign but impotent paternal figure symbolizing moral authority.

The most crucial ordeal that Valentine must undergo in "The Book of the Labyrinth" is not his audience with the Pontifex, but the "dream speaking" that Valentine must submit to first in order to prove his worth and the sincerity of his mission. This episode, described in poetic terms, is not only a fine performance, but is also one of many important moral tests that Valentine must pass on his route to the top of Castle Mount. The dream speaking, or interpretation of his dreams, explores his subconscious feelings and beliefs, not only proving his authenticity as a prince, but also establishing the moral idealism of his motives.

Valentine's meeting with the Pontifex, the climax for Book 4, proves to be an important moral initiation for Valentine into an age-old concept: the ultimate "vanity" of human wishes and human endeavor. For the Pontifex, the supreme power on Majipoor, is a shrunken old man of more than a hundred years, barely kept alive inside a glass bubble by life-support systems. Although Valentine obtains the Pontifex's blessing—a symbolic gesture of approval—the most important lesson he learns is the folly of all pursuit of power. Looking at Pontifex Tyeveras, Valentine reflects that "to behold him now was to understand the ultimate meaninglessness of supreme rank: a coronal lived in the world of deeds and moral responsibility, only to succeed to the Pontificate and finally to vanish into the Labyrinth and crazy senility" (LVC 367). Yet despite this recognition at the end of Book 4, Valentine resumes his effort to recover his lost throne. With the Pontifex's blessing Valentine now carries an aura of destiny, much like an anointed king in a Shakespearean play.

"The Book of the Castle," which concludes the epic, provides an impressive climactic sequence. This book continues the theme of ascent that began on the Isle of Sleep and ends with Valentine's triumph, releasing the planet from bondage to the usurper, and his sinister Svengali, the Shape-shifter who has become the King of Dreams. In his study of romance, Frye describes the "narrative themes and images of ascent" as "much as the same in reverse" as those of descent; and Frye contends, "the chief conceptions are those of escape, remembrance, or discovery of one's real identity, growing freedom, and the breaking of enchantment" (SS 129). In one sense, this is what the novel has been about; but it was not until Valentine's meeting with The Lady that the movement of the narrative turned clearly to the establishment of real identity and the breaking of the "enchantment" of Valentine.

The description of Valentine's progress toward victory at the top of Castle Mount is notable for two reasons: first, Valentine's conquest is largely a peaceful one of victory through guile and the revelation of his proper identity; and second, the triumphant march up Castle Mount allows Silverberg the chance to describe this magnificent conception of his imagination, the center of civilization on Majipoor. For Valentine's victory over the usurper Barjazid is more than a personal triumph; it represents the liberation of his civilization from a paralyzing and destructive bondage.

Silverberg's conception of Castle Mount is one of his finer imaginative inventions, a remarkable achievement of human ingenuity. The mountain is thirty miles high, but since the climate has been brought under control, millions dwell there in comfort, and it is adorned with many attractive cities, a testimony to the idea of human civilization. Throughout the Majipoor books, Castle Mount is associated with life at its most enjoyable. Its summit is a world with a symbolic name (Silver Mountain = Silverberg). This name reinforces the theme that Valentine's conquest is also symbolic of Silverberg's own recovery of his vocation as a novelist.

Nevertheless, despite the social and political importance of Valentine's victory, his march of conquest is a spiritual triumph as well. Ascension of the tower or mountain is an old metaphor for spiritual progress and victory, as Jung's theory of myths and other studies of symbolism indicate (DOS 344-345). Moreover, Valentine wins his victories most often simply by showing his credentials and persuading the citizens of the various cities and provinces to rally to his support.

Clearly the Valentine of the last book is a more mature, reflective man than the youthful wanderer of Book 1. He meditates philosophically on the possibility that his own suffering may have resulted because "the Divine" employs "compensating forces," according to the wizard Deliamber; or, as he puts it, "It may be that I was chosen to be an instrument of Deliamber's compensating forces, and it was necessary for me to suffer in order to be

effective" (LVC 394). Moreover, Valentine is capable of regarding his own political tactics with a sophisticated and sardonic amusement:

A certain amount of show business, Valentine recognized, was an essential lubricant in many civilized activities, not only those of wizards and jugglers, but those also of the Coronal, the Pontifex, the Lady, the King of Dreams, the speakers of dreams, the teachers of holy mysteries, perhaps even the customs officials at the provincial boundaries and the sellers of sausages in street-side booths. In plying one's trade one could not be too bold and blunt; one had to cloak one's doing in magic, in theater. (LVC 395)

These are the thoughts of the sophisticated trickster that Valentine has become, the deft political leader who thinks of his strategy in the final battle as a supreme embodiment of the juggler's act.

Book 5 reaches its climax in a epiphany of law and justice, rather like the ending of a detective or suspense story. The usurper, Dominin Barjazid, is confronted, routed, and shown to be merely a pawn of the actual schemer and conspirator, the King of Dreams, his supposed father. However, this father is revealed, in turn, as a Metamorph or Shapeshifter who has replaced the original king. So the novel ends with a triple reversal and unmasking. The first two recognitions of fraud and evil are expected. The third revelation is a surprise, although wholly credible, for the novel has constantly alluded to the presence of the Metamorphs and their condition as outcasts and as a dispossessed people.

It is to Silverberg's credit, however, that in the unmasking of his villain he provides the latter with an understandable motive beyond malice or the mere love of power. However warped the false King of Dreams may seem to be, his existence as the leader of a despised and displaced people gains him some sympathy, and gives Valentine a motive for considering social reforms that will treat the Metamorphs with more compassion. As *Valentine Pontifex* (1983) later shows, Valentine is uniquely qualified to understand the Metamorphs' desire for social justice.

In addition, Silverberg's conclusion provides poetic justice for the nominal usurper, a justice that is appropriate without being vindictive: Dominin Barjazid becomes insane when he learns the truth about the Metamorph's imposture. Thus, Silverberg has written a massive epic containing a good deal of melodramatic action, yet free from the violence and harsher passions often associated with such works. His hero is not flawed by ambition, hatred, or the desire for revenge. In his triumph, he becomes almost saintly.

Although technically within the realm of science fiction, because most of its action is justifiable by some actual or postulated scientific law, *Lord Valentine's Castle* clearly tends to blur the boundaries between fantasy and sci-

ence fiction. Its themes and symbolism are close to the traditional interests of fantasy, making the designation of "science fantasy" appropriate. Obviously, the novel makes use of the rich traditional symbolism of literary romance: themes of ascent and descent; of lost identity and doubles; of perilous journeys and enchanted islands; of labyrinths of confusion and mountains of achievement. Yet, as this analysis has attempted to demonstrate, *Lord Valentine's Castle* is a very sophisticated romance, and the use of naive plot elements should not mislead the reader into considering Silverberg's vision to be a retrogression to simple adventure fiction. In fact, Valentine passes through many of the crucial stages of the hero in Joseph Campbell's "monomyth," defined in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949).

In the final analysis, *Lord Valentine's Castle* portrays its hero as a sophisticated and pacifistic late twentieth-century liberal, a leader, however, who will fight if he must. Nevertheless, Valentine is an artist and moral idealist who learns that his destiny is to rule, and that his vision must be enlarged to serve desirable humanist purposes. The novel continues the affirmative mood of *Shadrach in the Furnace*; as *Lord Valentine's Castle* and *Valentine Pontifex* both suggest, government and civilization are still possible ideals.

An artist's proper use of his talent is to ascend the mountain of achievement, and in writing *Lord Valentine*, Silverberg resumed his career by scaling a formidable mountain. Like Valentine, Silverberg regained his crown through the completion of a magnificent effort.

Having created an imaginary world so rich in history and detailed in geography as Majipoor, with its colorful and romantic non-human species and its complex neo-medieval political system, Silverberg left himself the opportunity to return to the planet to elaborate its history and traditions further. Majipoor seems to be unveiled with effortless ease in *Lord Valentine's Castle*, as Silverberg's dreaming imagination rolls back its mists and peoples it with a prodigal invention. To leave such an enthralling planet, replete with romantic wonders, after one novel, would have appeared to be a waste of one's creation.

At any rate, it was not long before Silverberg returned to the world of Majipoor in a series of short stories that were published as a single work in 1982 under the title *Majipoor Chronicles*. (Some had appeared earlier in magazines.) *Majipoor Chronicles* is sometimes referred to as a "sequel" to *Lord Valentine's Castle*, and the third Majipoor volume, *Valentine Pontifex* (1983) is described by some as the completion of a "Majipoor trilogy." The last phrase may be appropriate, but it would be more precise to call *Majipoor Chronicles* a "prequel" to *Lord Valentine's Castle*, since it deals with events that occurred before the opening of the novel; and aside from a brief appearance by Valentine in the final story, *Majipoor Chronicles* only employs one character from *Lord Valentine's Castle*—the boy, Hissune, who func-

tions primarily as a narrative device. If "sequel" is employed in a precise way, then *Valentine Pontifex* is the genuine sequel to *Lord Valentine's Castle*, while *Majipoor Chronicles* is its "prequel."

Majipoor Chronicles consists of ten stories, each representing an important event or era in the history of the planet. According to the frame narrative, Hissune, the clever street urchin whom Valentine selected as a protégé on his journey through the labyrinth, finds each of the stories in the "Register of Souls," a repository of tales in the archives of the Labyrinth. The "Register of Souls" has the imprint of "memory readings" of the lives of several million citizens of Majipoor who are deceased; hence, the capsules provide more than a recorded oral history or a written chronicle, for they reveal a highly subjective experience of history, including what the actors and spectators have seen, as well as their emotions as they lived it. By entering the past through the capsules in the "Register of Souls," Hissune is able to experience history from within, an approach that is perhaps the only method through which one can really learn much that is significant about the past. The need to understand history imaginatively is made clear by Silverberg when he describes Hissune at the beginning as being confused by the sheer mass of data and statistics he discovers.

For Hissune, the visits to the "Register of Souls" are an important part of his education, and they are sanctioned by Valentine, although Hissune is unaware of that. His visits to the "Register of Souls" are infrequent and extend over a period of several years, stretching from age fourteen to eighteen. They have a certain ritualistic quality, but they do not seem to correspond to stages in his own development. Had Silverberg been able to link the ten stories to ten stages in Hissune's own crises in the passage from childhood to manhood, *Majipoor Chronicles* might be a major masterpiece.

On the other hand, the use of Hissune as a unifying device is not exactly whimsical or fanciful. Even if Hissune seems a mere convenience, his presence prepares Silverberg's readers for the important role he is to play in *Valentine Pontifex*. It is also quite clear from *Majipoor Chronicles* that Hissune is Valentine's own choice for a successor.

The ten stories themselves are poetic fables, narrated with Silverberg's usual synthesis of restrained urbanity, tact, and condensed, almost epigrammatic, irony. The first and one of the best, "Thesme and the Ghayrog," describes a love between a young rebellious human woman and a reptilian alien of a species just beginning to emigrate to Majipoor. Thesme, the young woman, has rebelled against the dull conformity of her provincial life in a colonial town by moving out into the jungle. There she encounters the Ghayrog, who is essentially a detached rationalist, but injured and in need of her help. After she tends to his hurts, they become lovers, and she flaunts her defiance of convention in visits to her native town. Eventually, however, the Ghayrog leaves to return to his people, and she learns that he cared little for her, but became her lover out of kindness. Maturing as a result of

this experience, she returns to town life and conformity, eventually marrying an adolescent sweetheart whom she had earlier scorned.

However, many of the other stories are slighter in nature. "The Time of the Burning" gives a routine picture of a stubborn landowner in the Metamorph War. "Calintane Explains" describes a pontifex who pretends to be mad to escape the responsibility of his role. Using a cross-dressing ruse, he masquerades as a woman and declares himself the new "Lady of the Isle of Sleep" in order to escape the Labyrinth. By contrast, "The Desert of Stolen Dreams" is an adventure story, describing the creation of the position of "King of Dreams," as a result of a conflict between Dekkeret, a lord of Castle Mount suffering from a Conradian concern for honor, and Barjazid, a rogue who uses a dream machine to afflict travelers.

One of the better stories is "The Soul-Painter and the Shapeshifter," describing a somewhat ironic romance between a human and a Metamorph, Sarise, who for a time creates an idyllic relationship by assuming the form of human beauty the painter most admires. Later, the painter sees her in her Metamorph form and decides that this is more beautiful than any human shape she can assume. When she is eventually taken away by Metamorph tribesmen, the painter laments his loss, but it inspires him to paint scenes of his lost happiness, which gain a vogue on Castle Mount because they seem exotic.

Silverberg's use of remote settings, removed from ethnic stereotypes, gives a romantic aura to what could be commonplace tales of sin and redemption. In "Crime and Punishment," for instance, a tale of obsessive guilt takes on a kind of Arabian Nights atmosphere, revealing a common theme among these chronicles of Majipoor: a frustration or a defeat often turns out to be a blessing or a victory in disguise. Here a successful murderer is haunted by the memory of his undetected crime, and tormented by accusing dreams, he abandons his wealth to become a gardener under the protection of The Lady on her island. Years later, he accidentally confronts the son of the man he murdered, and is forgiven, although he has not yet managed to forgive himself. As in more famous stories of crime and punishment, the worst penalty is the ache of conscience.

In the eighth and ninth stories, similar ironies abound. The eighth story, "Among the Dream Speakers," is a trivial tale of a student who prepares for a final test only to learn that she is expected to make up the questions herself. However, the ninth, which rivals "The Soul-Painter and the Shape Shifter" for artistry, is a charming tale of a shopkeeper who, bilked by a couple of scoundrels, turns the event into a benefit. Deceived into believing she had inherited an estate in Ni-Moya, she goes there; but she stays on to become a clever thief, the mistress of the owner of the estate, his wife, and finally his heir. Character *is* destiny.

These tales constantly play on the ironic disparity of illusion and reality, as in the final story, "Voriach and Valentine," which provides a glimpse of

Valentine before his coronation and amnesia, as a carefree aristocrat engaging in sexual dalliance with a witch. Here the story establishes that Valentine did not expect to be a figure of destiny and only became coronal because his brother, the initial choice, died unexpectedly. Thus, the final story maintains the volume's note of characteristic irony.

In an epilogue, Hissune, now eighteen, decides that his experiences with the "Register of Souls" have given him greater understanding of the planet he inhabits. Then Hissune is summoned to visit Valentine on the latter's ritual journey through the Labyrinth. Here Valentine informs Hissune that his own ambiguous destiny is to go to Castle Mount for an important future—presumably to train to be coronal. Hissune also learns that Valentine has known of his browsing in the "Register of Souls" and sanctioned it in order to encourage the boy to educate himself. It is a fair assessment of the *Majipoor Chronicles* to say that the book contains some of Silverberg's more fanciful stories, and they help to flesh out the history of Majipoor.

Silverberg returned to Majipoor again in *Valentine Pontifex* (1983) after a large investment of energy in another project, *Lord of Darkness*, a massive novel about Africa in the Elizabethan age. *Valentine Pontifex* deals with a war between the Metamorphs and the dominant civilization of Majipoor, and resolves the conflict between the two species that was defined in the earlier books. *Valentine Pontifex* also examines a question not fully answered in *Lord Valentine's Castle*: how Valentine will handle the responsibilities of kingship. Finally, this third Majipoor book contrasts the pragmatic cleverness of Hissune with the moral idealism of Valentine, with the values of the latter emerging victorious.

Unfortunately, *Valentine Pontifex*, although a very dramatic narrative, lacks the sheer imaginative exuberance of the first two Majipoor books. Most of the original cast of *Lord Valentine's Castle* is brought back for this sequel, but despite efforts to make secondary characters like Carabella play significant roles, the novel remains focused on Valentine and Hissune. Few additional characters are added, and the richness of invention of *Lord Valentine's Castle* and *Majipoor Chronicles* seems absent.

The strength of *Valentine Pontifex* lies in the urgency of its dramatic conflict. With the Metamorph army arising and marching against the government of Castle Mount during the final half of the novel, Silverberg establishes an atmosphere of crisis during which both Valentine and his tough-minded protégé, Hissune, are tested. Valentine's conduct seems so enigmatic that rumors of his incipient insanity circulate; and Hissune, who believes in guile and force, is on the point of seizing control of the government while marching to war against the Shapeshifters. Valentine's "madness," however, is revealed to be the logic of his moral idealism, since his aim is a peaceful resolution of the conflict, rather than a destructive and relentless war.

When Valentine's plan results in a negotiated settlement between the Metamorphs and the other species of Majipoor, his moral wisdom appears to be as sagacious as that of the legendary Solomon. Moreover, he resolves his conflict with Hissune by resigning the throne of the coronal, designating Hissune as his successor, while Valentine assumes the senior kingship, or the throne of the pontifex. The price of such an action, however, is considerable: Valentine must leave the throne and pageantry of Castle Mount for the obscurity and privacy of the Labyrinth, a burden so heavy that—as *Majipoor Chronicles* makes clear—many coronals avoid it as long as possible, with one pontifex even willing to dress as a woman and feign insanity in order to escape it. Clearly, Valentine's accession to the senior throne embodies Heraclitus's famous paradox that "the way up and the way down are one and the same," and the descent to the Labyrinth symbolizes the acceptance of the responsibility of supreme power.

Thus, even the success of moral idealism has its costs, as Silverberg had already suggested in the conclusion to *Shadrach in the Furnace*. Despite occasional moments of lightness, *Valentine Pontifex* is very serious in tone, almost wholly focused on the responsibilities of rule. A secondary motif is also present in the depiction of Valentine's determination to have peace: this theme restates Silverberg's concern with the avoidance of war and the need to establish the values of peace on a firm footing. Reinforcing these thematic concerns is Silverberg's obsessive moral examination of the treatment of primitive and aboriginal peoples by stronger and more technologically advanced peoples. In the reconciliation between the dominant society of Majipoor and the Metamorphs, there is the symbolic theme that ancient wrongs done to primitive peoples, especially those inspired or justified by ethnic differences, should be confronted and redressed. No civilization can be morally or psychologically whole, the novel implies, until such venerable crimes and guilts are redressed and expiated. In this respect, *Valentine Pontifex* recapitulates a theme of much of Silverberg's earlier work. Nevertheless, Silverberg's emphasis on moral responsibility and his resolute insistence on making the world of Majipoor a stage for moral trial make *Valentine Pontifex* a relatively austere novel. Some of the color and pageantry of *Lord Valentine's Castle* remain, but the sense of freshness, spontaneity, and richness of invention that contributed so effectively to *Lord Valentine's Castle* is absent. Nevertheless, *Valentine Pontifex* returned to the study of political conflict, which is one of Silverberg's strengths.

Silverberg has also returned to Valentine's era on Majipoor in the novella, "The Seventh Shrine" (1998), which deals with an incident late in Valentine's career as pontifex. Here Valentine's unrelenting effort to improve the lot of the aboriginal Shapeshifters (or Puirivari) takes him to a remote archaeological dig where a murder has occurred and a tomb ostensibly has been defiled. Silverberg carefully avoids the clichés associated with such stories. The original crime that led to a sealed tomb is demythologized and

the ambiguities involving the archaeologist's murder are resolved. Valentine manages to be both scholarly and politically correct: he insists on having the tomb opened to learn its secrets, but he also decrees that the tomb should be forever sealed out of respect to the indigenous people of the planet. Remaining consistent with his principles in earlier appearances, Valentine remains an embodiment of enlightened liberal humanitarianism.

With an invented world so rich in potential stories, it was inevitable that Silverberg would return to fiction set in Majipoor after allowing this territory to lie fallow. His first addition to the saga in the nineties seemed tentative, however; *The Mountains of Majipoor* (1995) is a vividly imagined but slight tale of a Majipoor diplomat's initiation into serious politics in a primitive mountain country. While negotiating the release of hostages from the savage kingdom of Othinor—a hunting culture that lacks written records and relies on oral tradition—Prince Harpirias learns to bend local customs and needs to his own purposes.

One of his tactics is to engage in a love affair with the king's daughter, while he devises a stratagem to gain the king's agreement to a treaty releasing the Majipoor hostages, a group of hapless paleontologists. This plan requires his translator, a clever Shapeshifter, to engage in improvised theatrics in order to frighten off a tribe of primitive Metamorphs who have been troubling the kingdom. At the end, Prince Harpirias returns in triumph to Castle Mount, leaving behind the king's daughter, now pregnant, but obliged by custom to remain in her father's snow-clad mountain realm. This Silverberg hero gains insight into the craft of politics, but apparently leaves his paramour without regret. Moreover, though he performs his diplomatic duties well, Harpirias never quite loses his sense of superiority to the primitive culture of Othinor. Hence, though this minor novel opens up new territory on Majipoor, it lacks emotional depth; moreover, some readers are likely to find the protagonist's moral behavior toward his lover to be unsympathetic. At any rate, *The Mountains of Majipoor*, while mildly entertaining, seems to lack emotional depth, and it is hampered by an annoying hero.

Sorcerers of Majipoor (1996) is much stronger stuff. Here Silverberg returns to the large-scale epic conflict of *Lord Valentine's Castle*, dealing with a constitutional crisis and civil war that occurred a thousand years before Valentine's time. As the Valentine novels illustrated, Silverberg invented an unusual monarchical and aristocratic form of government for Majipoor, a world imagined to exist several thousand years in the future. According to Majipoor's unwritten constitution, the monarchy is not hereditary—presumably because the political and social history of monarchies on earth has shown this method of government to be ineffective and unsatisfactory. Instead, there are two reigning monarchs, the coronal, a younger executive and ceremonial leader, and the pontifex, an older and presumably wiser man,

who must be a former coronal. Each coronal becomes pontifex when the current pontifex dies. Meanwhile, the current coronal must select a successor to his throne from the available aristocracy, with the chief restriction on his choice being that this successor may not be a son or daughter. In theory, the pontifex as a political force acts as a check against the potential absolutism of the coronal. As Majipoor is portrayed as a relatively pacific planet where a world government operates efficiently and is accepted readily, this dual monarchy seems to rule efficaciously.⁹

However, *Sorcerers of Majipoor* deals with what is essentially a constitutional crisis over the succession of rule, with an usurpation that eventually produces a civil war. With a large canvas and cast to work with, Silverberg constructs a novel of political intrigue and evil conflict with epic stature. In essence, his hero, Prestimion, naively trusting to tradition, fails to secure his expected succession to the throne of the coronal and finds that his royal position has been taken by Korsibar, the son of the weary reigning coronal. In his usurpation, Korsibar is encouraged by his ambitious sister, Thismet, who hopes to rule with him and control him, and by Prestimion's cunning cousin, Dantirya Sambail, who plans to create enough conflict to destroy both Korsibar and Prestimion. Korsibar is also aided by the ambiguous help of one of Majipoor's ubiquitous sorcerers, who frequently exert a dubious influence on the political affairs of the planet.

The usurpation reveals the strengths and weaknesses of all involved. Although Korsibar, like the biblical King Saul of Israel, is a man who possesses the handsome and swaggering air of a monarch without the political acumen and psychological strength needed for the role, his seizure of the throne appears beyond reversal when it becomes a *fait accompli*. This is a situation that reveals a weakness in the political constitution of Majipoor. Fearing his sister's dominance, Korsibar alienates her by excluding her from power, but he readily falls victim to more subtle influences, including the stratagems of Dantirya Sambail, whose shifting allegiances are nearly successful in destroying both the usurping and the rightful claimants.

Prestimion's eventual conquest of the throne comes only after intrigue, battles, exile, personal suffering, and his own reluctant enlistment of sorcerers to help. Although he finally gains the restless Thismet as his lover, his final victory comes at a severe cost, including the death of Thismet in the final battle as she attempts to succor her unfortunate brother. (Despite being strongly attracted to Prestimion, her emotional bond with Korsibar is so intense as to suggest incestuous feeling.) In sum, then, Prestimion learns that the cost of attaining power is so demanding and arduous that he wishes that he had never challenged Korsibar's rule.

As a novel, *Sorcerers of Majipoor* has a plot resembling a history play of Shakespeare, with its insistence on the tragic cost of attaining power and wrestling with its responsibilities. Ironically, however, unlike a Shakespearean history play, the story of Korsibar's usurpation is telepathically expunged

from the memory of all but the victorious ruler and his confidants at the novel's end. This curious resolution suggests that there might be tragedies in history from which we do not learn anything, and which are better forgotten.

Despite the romantic aura of the Majipoor world, with its aristocrats, monarchs, strange beasts, sorcerers, and ritual combats with sword and bow and arrow, *Sorcerers of Majipoor* is less romantic than tragic and ironic in its effect. Korsibar and Thismet are tragic figures of stature, and Dantirya Sambail is depicted as a resourceful villain who might dominate a tragic Jacobean play. As a monarch who must earn his throne and recognize the importance of sorcerers (those who try to manage the irrational forces of life), Prestimion receives an education in practical politics that would temper a Renaissance prince.

In short, *Sorcerers of Majipoor* returns to the study of political intrigue at which Silverberg has excelled throughout his career. The author reminds us that Majipoor offers an ironic reflection on our world when some of the characters engage in a speculative discussion of a political system with an elective monarch serving a short term, much like the system long used in twentieth-century North America (SOM 338). This arrangement, the characters conclude, would have flaws making it inferior to Majipoor's dual monarchy. The effect of this dialogue is to remind us of the imperfection of all political systems as schemes of government.

However, we must note that *Sorcerers of Majipoor* continues to depict the nature of Majipoor's magic in a somewhat ambiguous way. The sorcerers themselves claim to practice a science or art, and it is clear that some sorcery actually works: the sending of dreams by telepathic means, the ability to create illusory appearances, and so on. Yet, even these forms of "magic" appear to be the result of sophisticated machinery. In point of fact, Majipoor is not an invented planet where magic is as potent as it first appears. Thus the novels remain examples of "science fantasy," to use Attebery's helpful phrase.

Nevertheless, whatever definitions are invoked, the Majipoor saga deserves respect. Majipoor is one of the most imaginative invented planets in the galaxy of science fiction, comparable in detail and history to Larry Niven's Ringworld, or Frank Herbert's Dune, and usually the scene of more interesting stories than either. Silverberg's Majipoor is worthy of comparison to Brian Aldiss's world of Helliconia, which is—along with Gene Wolfe's distant future earth in *The Book of the New Sun*—the absolute benchmark standard by which all other invented worlds should be measured. Although romantic fictional worlds are out of fashion in many circles, the Majipoor books are, for the most part, works of fiction displaying mature characterization and moral sophistication.

The Mature Novelist, from *Lord of Darkness* to *The Alien Years*: Reinventing the Past and Returning to Science Fiction Tradition



After the creation of Majipoor, Silverberg resumed writing stories and novels with other settings. Although at first his shorter fiction returned to the satirical and ironic modes of his third period, he eventually began to invest more emotional currency in his shorter fiction. As a novelist, he also displayed some uncertainty of intention, although he continued to adapt the modernist vision of existential anxiety to science fictional forms and settings.

For a time in the eighties, Silverberg attempted to establish himself as a historical novelist, publishing two works on an epic scale. However, he returned to the role of science fiction novelist with a number of impressive works, including *The Face of the Waters*, which renewed the mystical quest of the middle period, and *At Winter's End*, an epic novel reaffirming humane values in the imaginative story of a mutated humanoid species making a new beginning. In the nineties, it has become clear that Silverberg has returned to classic science fiction themes in such novels as *Hot Sky at Midnight*, *Starborne*, and *The Alien Years*, works of grace and moral dignity.

Both the shorter fiction and the novels include works of impressive strength. A brief tour of the short fiction must suffice here as a prelude to a study of Silverberg's major efforts in the novel during the eighties and nineties. Moreover, Silverberg's later short fiction has moved from the ironic aloofness noted by Clareson (RSMT 10) to greater emotional involvement with characters and themes.

In addition to *Majipoor Chronicles*, Silverberg began producing science fiction in shorter forms once more in 1980. Most of these were highly

disciplined and elegantly ironic exercises, collected in *The Conglomeroid Cocktail Party* (1984), a volume displaying a unified tone of urbane satire on social pretense. However, much of the later short fiction, revealing more emotional involvement and humane sympathy, has appeared in a large 1992 volume, *Secret Sharers: The Collected Stories of Robert Silverberg*. Presumably other volumes of collected short fiction will continue to appear, since Silverberg continues to publish short work in numerous magazines and to win accolades for his short stories.

Clearly Silverberg has overcome his reservations about writing short stories. Although he confessed to an initial hesitation about returning to short fiction after the four-year hiatus in his writing, he overcame this inner resistance and began to produce short fiction regularly in 1980 (TCCP 1). His reservations were related to the limited nature of the shorter forms in contrast to the possibilities of the novel.

Somewhat modestly, Silverberg credits the promptings of editors as well as the lure of money as his initial motives for resuming short stories, giving particular thanks to Ben Bova and Robert Sheckley, editors of *Omni*, and George Scithers, an early editor of *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction* (TCCP 2-3). However, to take this explanation literally would be ingenuous. Silverberg had shown considerable skill in the short fiction early in his career, and the short story always offers the attraction of creating a virtually flawless work of literary art.

His command of tone and elegance of style have made the short story a showpiece for Silverberg's art. Not only has his short fiction of the past two decades appeared in the best science fiction magazines, especially *Asimov's*, but it has also found its way into the pages of such slick magazines as *Playboy*. Several stories have been honored by being selected for Gardner Dozois's excellent "Year's Best Science Fiction" anthologies.

Nevertheless, Silverberg's initial coolness toward the shorter form may in part account for the urbane but aloof irony found in the early stories in this period, especially in *The Conglomeroid Cocktail Party*. A quick scan of representative stories from this volume reveals its pervasive satirical spirit. In "The Pope of the Chimps," Silverberg continues his ridicule of institutional religion, targeting the Roman Catholic Church, as he also had in "Good News from the Vatican." Here a project dedicated to improving the intelligence of chimpanzees is more successful than intended: scientists are chagrined to find that the brightest chimp has assumed the position of high priest or pope. Acting in the role of "Pope Leo," this simian decrees that God has ordained murder as a means of sending chimps to heaven. A series of ritual murders follows, which end only when a woman researcher persuades Pope Leo that on a recent visit to heaven, God informed her that he wants the murders to stop. This satire on religious authority and literal-minded followers is amusing but not especially subtle.

Much of the satire in this collection, however, is directed at a contemporary society that shows ample evidence of lapsing into decadence. "The Palace at Midnight" and "At the Conglomeroid Cocktail Party" lampoon a futuristic American society that substitutes wealth and style for serious enterprise and moral rigor. "The Palace at Midnight" is a mordant but amusing tale that portrays an extrapolated future where America has lost its identity and collapsed into small provinces ruled by fanatics or local self-styled aristocrats. Similarly, grotesque social caricatures exchange banalities in "At the Conglomeroid Cocktail Party," although this story is little more than a satirical sketch. Another acerbic tale, "The Trouble with Sempoanga," describes a planet that has become a giant tourist resort. Everything is scenic and accommodating, except for one flaw: Sempoanga is an excellent place to acquire a venereal disease of great potency (though the malady is unnamed, readers will think of AIDS). A world-weary mood suffuses these stories, such as "Waiting for the Earthquake," where the planet Medea is about to be destroyed by a gigantic quake. Most of the humans have fled, but the protagonist stays as a self-imposed punishment for human exploitation of the planet.

Although some stories seem futuristic exaggerations of the experiences in the San Francisco Bay area in the 1980s, "A Thousand Places along the Via Dolorosa" takes place in Jerusalem at Easter, and offers a qualified note of affirmation. Horncastle, a bored scholar on sabbatical, tries to recover a sense of the meaning of life near scenes of Jewish sacrifice and the Christian passion. Collapsing on the Via Dolorosa (or way of the cross), he awakens on Easter with a sense of the renewed value of life; but his renewal is entirely secular and personal.

Other stories return to a favorite source of Silverberg paradoxes and ironies, time travel. In "Gianni" modern decadence is satirized when the composer Pergolesi is brought forward to a near future to become an electric pop rock composer who burns out quickly on drugs. In "The Far Side of the Bell-Shaped Curve," Reichenback replicates himself in order to commit the clever murder of a rival for the love of Ilsabet; predictably, his other self, the actual murderer, frames the less culpable Reichenback for the crime. "Needle in a Timestack" is more playful, as the hero manipulates past time so that the former husband of his wife, a notorious playboy, who persists in harassing her, is given a different past. This story, which appropriates an old title from one of Silverberg's sixties collections, attains a measure of light comedy. Nevertheless, the prevailing tone of *The Conglomeroid Cocktail Party* is one of detached and weary irony.

Silverberg continued to turn out deft ironic tales—some of them quite trivial—during the decade 1983–92, including "Multiples," "Tourist Trade," "The Pardoner's Tale," "Hardware," and the impressive "Basilus," all collected in *Secret Sharers*. However, his short stories begin to

feature more sympathetic characters and a greater degree of emotional commitment. A glance at some of the better performances shows this changing mood.

"Basileus" (1983), a story chosen by writers and editors for *The Fantasy Hall of Fame* (1998), which Silverberg also edited, continues the ironic tone of the earlier collection, describing a computer wizard who uses the Internet to create "virtual reality" versions of the famous angels of legend. Eventually, after inventing the supreme angel, Basileus, the angel of judgment, the protagonist is instructed by one of his invented beings that he himself must become Basileus. In a fit of depression, he capriciously programs both the Soviet and U.S. defense systems for attacks, and then resumes talking to his angels while the world has "six minutes left" (SS 72).

Other stories also deal with the ironic possibilities afforded by computer technology, including "The Pardoner's Tale" (1986), where a hacker adroitly remakes reality, and "Chip Runner" (1987), where a fifteen-year-old boy hacker becomes so committed to his work or art that he essentially starves himself. On the whole, however, these exercises in irony are less memorable than the stories involving more sympathetic protagonists.

Emotional involvement becomes a theme of the curious story "Homefaring" (1983), in which Silverberg returned to the theme of the isolated human consciousness and the overwhelming desire for telepathic communion with another being. McCulloch, a researcher from the twenty-first century travels to a distant future and finds the dominant species to be an underwater creature much like a giant lobster. These beings communicate telepathically, creating a rich sense of community that proves seductive to McCulloch; he enjoys life with this telepathic herd so much that he resists "homefaring" (or return to his own time) and must be forcibly removed by his fellow scientists. The need to escape the limitations of self is difficult to evade, as Silverberg had suggested in earlier works.

Strong emotional concerns emerge in two fine stories suggesting intertextual relationships with literary antecedents, "Sailing to Byzantium" and "The Secret Sharer." "Sailing to Byzantium" (*Asimov's*, February 1985) turns away from irony to offer a science fiction image of enduring love, enhanced by a title taken from W. B. Yeats's famous poem. In the Yeats lyric, the speaker envisions a fulfilling and enduring existence as a creature of pure artifice, a mechanical nightingale who will "sing / To lords and ladies of Byzantium / Of what is passing, or past, or to come." Silverberg's protagonist, Charles Phillips, does not, however, seek an eternal existence as an artist in a holy city of the imagination; instead, he yearns for eternal love with Gioia, his beautiful paramour. Finding an enduring relationship with Gioia, Phillips believes they can live comfortably together as a pair of loving eternal tourists in a high tech world fifty centuries after Christ, visiting ersatz reconstructed cities of the past, such as Byzantium.

However, Phillips suffers the pain of loss when Gioia deserts him. Searching for her, Phillips discovers in a shocking surprise that he is an android programmed to think as a terrestrial from the 1980s. Meeting Gioia again, he learns that her departure was due to a realization that she was beginning to age, whereas he is artificial but immortal. However, Phillips persuades Gioia to undergo an operation and have her consciousness placed in an artificial but ageless body. Thus the couple attain an enduring form of romantic transcendence. Clearly, this story has simple allegorical implications, since Gioia's name suggests "joy."

"Sailing to Byzantium" evidently gained the respect of some discerning readers, for it earned Silverberg another Nebula Award. It is one of his more significant treatments of the importance of romantic and monogamous love, in contrast to more superficial relations. A recent essay on love and lust in Silverberg's work by Rafeeq McGiveron in *Extrapolation* (Spring 1998) reaches the scarcely surprising conclusion that Silverberg has given preferential treatment to romantic monogamy; but McGiveron, drawing most of his evidence from the middle Silverberg, seems indifferent to this story's existence or Silverberg's treatment of romantic love in more recent novels.

A more tragic tone appears in "The Secret Sharer" (1987), a novella with intertextual connections to Conrad. Here Conrad's fictive situation is transmuted into an episode on a starship, and the "secret sharer" is both feminine and disembodied, as Silverberg reshapes the Conradian plot. Silverberg's hero is a young officer similar to Conrad's Marlow, who harbors a fugitive stowaway. However, the secret sharer is Vox, a stowaway who becomes a disembodied "matrix" of electronic impulses for the duration of the trip. Whereas Conrad's Marlow helped his "secret sharer" or doppelgänger to escape from the ship, Vox, facing discovery, must flee to the vacuum outside after accidentally alerting the crew to her presence. She accepts the prospect of gradual dissolution in space as a just punishment for having inadvertently caused the death of another passenger in suspended animation. Though Silverberg gives an attractive personality to his feminine fugitive and she develops a close relationship with the protagonist, his version reaches a more tragic resolution than the Conrad story.

Another story with intertextual relationships to classic science fiction and classic poetry is *In Another Country*, which narrates an elegiac romance between an extraterrestrial and a human woman. Originally published in *Asimov's* (March 1989) and then in a TOR double edition with C. L. Moore's popular 1946 novella, *Vintage Season*, *In Another Country* offers homage to Moore's much admired romantic tale, by treating its events in a parallel version. Silverberg's introduction to the book-length volume describes the relationship of the story to Moore's: his aim was "to produce a work interwoven with hers the way a lining of a cape is interwoven with the cape itself" (IAC vii).

Silverberg uses Moore's setting, Southern California in 1945, but reverses Moore's fictional situation. Moore's novella describes a star-crossed romance between an alien woman tourist who is visiting earth incognito and falls into a relationship with a terrestrial male. Their affair ends unhappily for both, though the novella's resolution seems to be hastily developed. In Silverberg's tale, the alien is Thimirol, a male cosmopolitan poet who avoids emotional attachments. However, he visits earth as a part of a tourist group and succumbs to love with Christine, a terrestrial woman. He suffers tragic loss when he watches Christine's destruction by a giant meteor—the closing disaster also featured in Moore's story.

Another return to science fiction tradition appears in alternate history stories from the early nineties. In "Looking for the Fountain" (*Asimov's*, May 1992), Ponce de Leon actually finds the Fountain of Youth in an alternate history version of the Florida exploration. However, the Fountain turns out to be merely a source of sexual renewal, not eternal youth. "Lion Time in Timbuctoo" (*Asimov's*, October 1990) is an amusing novella set in the alternate history continuum of *The Gate of Worlds*, but introducing different characters. In a story featuring a light comic touch, a naive English diplomat is given a sexual and political initiation in his visit to Timbuctoo, now the capital of a powerful black Islamic empire.

Perhaps the best of these alternate history stories, however, is "Tales from the Venia Woods" (FASF, October 1989), set in an alternate twentieth century along the Danube, where two children encounter an elderly and eccentric recluse. The old gentleman is revealed to be the surviving Roman emperor in a time stream where the empire did not fall, but was overthrown in the twentieth century by fanatic Republicans. The tale ends tragically when the elderly emperor is murdered by partisans of the Republic, who like many rebel factions, are determined to eradicate any vestige of the past. Thus, Silverberg's slight story offers an indirect comment on the savagery of ideological fanaticism.

To sum up, then, Silverberg's recent work in shorter fiction is very accomplished, but rather muted in its effect. His return to the science fiction tradition parallels his later work in the novel.

In the novels he began to write after *Lord Valentine's Castle*, Silverberg returned to the problems and moral dilemmas of history, whether in the human past, or in an imagined future. Although most of these novels were ambitious and epic in scope, they continued the study of moral testing that Silverberg had explored in the best of his third-period novels. Nor did Silverberg abandon his other cherished themes, especially the quest for a mystical transcendence that would bring together human and alien, and perhaps heal the wounds of loneliness and alienation.

After inventing Majipoor, his first major effort was *Lord of Darkness* (1983), a historical novel of Africa that revealed strong similarities to Con-

rad—a persistent influence on Silverberg, as we have noted.¹ However, this is not the only major novel that offers Conradian parallels. In fact, as Conrad was a novelist who studied the tragic irony of the historical process in *Nostromo* (1904) and *The Secret Agent* (1907), it is not surprising to find that Silverberg's spiritual kinship to Conrad emerges frequently in the novels of this decade (this relationship is acknowledged in one of the epigraphs to *The Face of the Waters*, which is taken from Conrad's *The Mirror of the Sea* [1906]).

Conrad's sense of the tragic nature of human effort, and the numerous ways that his protagonists betray their values, has been studied at length by numerous scholars. Conrad's vision is expressed most clearly in *Heart of Darkness*, perhaps the most accessible and widely read of his works and the one that Francis Ford Coppola adapted to film in an attempt to come to terms with the tragedy of the American war in Vietnam.² What is particularly important for us to remember about Conrad's fiction, however, is that there is, in Conrad's best novels, a complex balance of oppositions between romantic idealism and the forces of reality, usually nature and history. This tragic opposition also appears in *Lord of Darkness*, a novel that reshapes Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

Although Silverberg refers to *Lord of Darkness* as a "historical fantasy," it contains no magic or supernatural elements. It is a fantasy only in the sense that it is a work of the imagination.³ Nothing in the novel fits into the category of the fantastic, unless such characters as Dona Teresa and Calandola might be considered so because they seem larger than life. Or perhaps the narrator's survival of his ordeals with sanity intact should be considered fantastic.

In brief, the novel relates the adventures of Andrew Battell, an Elizabethan adventurer who sails to Brazil to make his fortune. In 1589, he is betrayed and abandoned by a fellow seaman, a rascal named Abraham Cocke, and falls into the hands of Portuguese captors who enslave him and take him to Angola. A long enslavement by the Portuguese follows, during which Battell serves several masters, all of whom promise to free him but ignore their promises. At last, Battell comes to feel loyalty for the best of his masters, Don Joao, but he becomes involved in a torrid affair with Dona Teresa, the half-caste lady who is Don Joao's mistress. Matters are complicated further by his involvement with Matamba, a beautiful young black woman. Torn between these two women, Battell's emotional distress is increased by the ambitious intrigues of Don Joao and his mistress, as the former seeks to gain political power and the latter schemes to gain power over both the don and Battell.

At last, Battell reaches a stage of complete disgust with Portuguese deceit and exploitation of those in colonial servitude, who come to symbolize the evils of European dominance. Fleeing into the bush, like an earlier Huckleberry Finn "lighting out for the territory," Battell finally takes refuge with

the savage tribe of the Jaqqas. Living as a white warrior among this tribe of formidable black cannibals restores Battell's sense of manhood; he becomes the companion of the Imbe (or Lord) Calandola, a feared and absolute monarch, who in turn is fascinated by Battell's white skin and blond hair—and his skill with a musket. (Battell's acceptance by the Jaqqas becomes more credible because of the Jaqqa custom of increasing their complement of warriors by raising captive children from other tribes and subjecting them to a severe discipline.)

After the duplicity of his Portuguese masters, Battell finds the more candid dedication to destruction of Calandola, the "lord of darkness," both repulsive and fascinating. Though he serves Calandola faithfully, Battell comes to regard the Jaqqa chief as more a demonic force than a mere man; and under his influence, Battell accepts the barbaric ritual of cannibalism (used by the Jaqqas as a way of triumphing over their enemies) and marries a Jaqqa woman. His time with the Jaqqas is brought to an end by an unexpected tragedy. First, his former mistress, Teresa, is captured by the tribe, and is killed after foolishly trying to escape. Then Calandola's ambitious lieutenants plan a mutiny, which explodes in a bloody riot at a feast. In the confusion Battell flees, returns to slavery under the Portuguese colonists, discovers that his former black lover, Matamba, has become a nun, and at last is freed by a kind master and allowed to return to England.

Settling in Essex, Battell becomes an Odysseus figure returned to Ithaca, a voyager who can only find release from the horrors of his grim experience by telling his story in a narrative for the printer and bookseller, Samuel Purchas. Battell's story is essentially a simple one, though elaborated in numerous and lengthy incidents. This novel is based on an Elizabethan travel narrative, though Silverberg has expanded the slender tale into a massive novel of 558 pages, employing a vivid and stylized Elizabethan prose of his invention.⁴ Because Elizabethan prose tends to be highly adorned with decorative similes and unnecessary Ciceronian parallelisms, Silverberg wisely restricted himself to formulaic phrasing and conventional Elizabethan idiom.

In considering the meaning of this novel, we may conclude that Battell's ability to relate the tale of his tragic experience helps to liberate him from the burden of his oppressive past, much as similar narrations provided psychological relief for previous literary mariners haunted by the horrors they have seen, such as Coleridge's "ancient mariner" and Conrad's Marlow who follows, somewhat distantly, in the Romantic tradition of the haunted wanderer with a harrowing tale to tell.⁵ Although, like some tragic heroes of the Elizabethan stage, Battell takes refuge in expressions of stoic Christian piety, these seem to be in part a desperate effort to control his sense of moral outrage and horror at the painful events he is obliged to describe. They become an attempt to cling to a pattern of faith or meaning that offers consolation for the senseless and destructive acts he has witnessed.

In essence, Silverberg's novel is an exploration of the vision of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, recast in the early days of European colonialism, with Portuguese rulers of Angola replacing the Belgians and with the cannibal chieftain Calandola replacing Kurtz as an archetypal figure of destructive force. Kurtz, of course, was a white idealist who surrendered to the fierce and warlike atmosphere of Africa, and to the darker forces in his own psyche; but like Calandola, Kurtz is a charismatic demagogue with a program for destruction. The destructive myth that Calandola serves will be examined in a moment.

First, we should note that Battell's journey involves a series of initiations for an explorer who begins in innocence but learns how inhumane his own European "civilization" is, even before deciding to enter Calandola's world. The key figures in these initiations are the intelligent and ambitious Don Joao and the less attractive Portuguese officials who teach him to distrust the claims of "civilized" Europeans to be humanitarian; and the ambitious ladies, Dona Teresa and Matamba, who introduce him to sensuality, yet show him how destructive unrestrained passion can be (as the epic fight of the two women over Battell demonstrates).

Finally in the heart of the most barbaric continent of his time, Battell encounters Calandola, and learns how mesmerizing a demagogue can be when he preaches a myth of destruction. Though Calandola follows the military ethos of the warrior Jaqqa culture, he might be more accurately described as a shaman or spiritual leader. At times, he seems demonic—an incarnation of the Jungian shadow—but Calandola is not a figure of melodrama; rather, he is humanized and given sympathetic traits of loyalty, acceptance of friendship, and even simple vanity. More significantly, his demagoguery has a basis in his peculiar vision of the Jaqqa destiny. This vision is based on his personal myth about the sanctity of the earth as a mother goddess. In Calandola's view, the Great Mother has been defiled, and the Jaqqa role is to destroy humanity, the agent of the earth's degradation. Influenced by liquor and Calandola's words, Battell himself is swayed by the hallucinatory power of this vision, as he admits:

And we stood side by side all that night, looking toward the desert and watching the witch-fires dancing in the air. And that witchery did enter my brain and inflame my blood, for the words of the Imbe-Jaqqa seemed crystal-clear and reasonable to me, and I made no quarrel with them. I saw the world as swarming with ugliness and treachery and corruption, and the good green breast of the earth encumbered with the ill-made works of man; and it seemed to me most peaceful and beautiful to sweep all that away, and return to the silence of the first Garden.

And when morning came, Imbe Calandola did mount a high scaffold and utter a warlike oration to his troops, inspiring them with the frenzy of battle. Whereupon they did sweep down upon the town of Kalungu and take it, and put its people to

the sword and its high slender palm-trees to the axe, and devour many of its folk boiled and roasted, and take its children by impressment into the tribe of Jaqqas. And in that was yet more of the land returned to its ancestral purity. And in doing this, I truly believe, the Jaqqas were aware of no hypocrisy, but were altogether sincere, in fullest knowledge that this was their divine mission, to smash and destroy until they had made all things whole. (LOD 393-394)

In creating this personal myth Calandola has made an extraordinary transformation of an Oedipus complex into a cosmic myth whereby the Great Mother, the earth itself, must be returned to a primal innocence because it has been profaned by human activity. Calandola argues that "this enslaving of the earth by farming and commerce is a great evil. It was not meant for mankind to do thus" (LOD 393). Yet Battell recognizes a humanity in Calandola that links him to the destructive leaders and conquerors in human history, and thereby heightens Calandola's tragic stature. However, Calandola's charismatic power also justifies Battell's frequent comparisons of Calandola to Lucifer.

In the final orgy of destruction following the feast, bitter internecine resentments and fratricidal rivalries erupt into a grotesque riot, as though the tribe's dedication to war and cannibalism contains the sources of its own dissolution. It is tempting to see in this scene of carnage, when the Jaqqas apparently destroy themselves, a symbol of the inevitable destruction and disintegration of societies devoted to heroic codes of warfare.

By contrast, the serenity of Battell's final years in Essex helps to establish a sense of the normal pattern of mundane life. Battell's return and adjustment to tranquil English life testify to his endurance, courage, and determination, qualities that enabled him to survive his ordeals in Africa. His heightened moral sensitivity is shown by his willingness to adopt a much younger woman whom he could probably take as a wife. Nor does he yield to a sense of despair over human depravity or the loss of his hopes and the apparent futility of his lost years, although he had been tempted to surrender to apathy and despair during his captivity. In these respects, Battell resembles Conrad's Marlow, although of course, Battell's trial in the wilderness has been harder and of much greater duration than Marlow's.

Like Marlow, Battell remains haunted by the horrors he has witnessed. He concedes that, even in his safe haven, the spirit of Calandola seems to be an oppressive demon that casts its spell over him in nightmares, demanding to be exorcised (LOD 555-556). Hopefully, his narrative provides a partial exorcism.

Somewhat like Marlow's narrative in *Heart of Darkness*, Battell's tale is not only a journey into the historical past, but also a voyage into the interior of the self, although Robert Killheffer in a perceptive essay on the novel contests this point (NYROSF 13). Battell's honesty and credibility are established by his unwillingness to spare himself in his narrative, or yield to

the temptation to make himself falsely heroic. Instead, he confesses that he found Calandola's vision of life attractive, and he acknowledges his own participation in the dark communion of cannibalism. Thus, *Lord of Darkness* might be described as not only a historical novel but also a fictional meditation on the tragic nature of history and human illusions.

As a matter of fact, the novel may be placed in a more restricted genre than that of "historical novel"; it should be placed in the category of novelistic treatments of what scholars in American literature call the "captivity narrative," which usually describes the ordeal of a white European or North American among an Indian tribe. It would thus join a classification that would include some distinguished predecessors, as well as a number of important mainstream novels based on captivity experiences, such as Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976) about life in colonial Australia.

Although Silverberg's novel does not quite achieve the extraordinary power of the work of the Australian Nobel laureate, *Lord of Darkness* is not dwarfed by the comparison to such a novel. In the final evaluation, even if the earlier sections seem overly prolix, *Lord of Darkness* is an impressive work. Whether it is Silverberg's best novel, as Killheffer argues (NYROSF 14), is another matter. In one of his final essays, Clareson suggested that it might be one of Silverberg's two "most significant" works of the 1980s (RSMT 9). Undeniably it is a memorable study of the impact of the African primitive world on the European consciousness.

The lure of historical fiction continued for Silverberg, despite frustration over lukewarm hardcover sales for *Lord of Darkness*. His next descent into the well of the past produced *Gilgamesh the King* (1984), an epic novel about the vanished world of ancient Sumeria at the dawn of history. This work was inspired by the exploits of Gilgamesh, the eponymous Sumerian hero celebrated in a cycle of poems that were given a written form not long after 2000 B.C., centuries before the recording of the Homeric epics.⁶ In these poems, which were found in cuneiform on clay tablets in the nineteenth century, Gilgamesh is presented as an epic hero and a tragic figure who reaches extraordinary achievements as a warrior king of his Mesopotamian city-state Uruk, yet finds himself baffled by the mystery of human mortality. Hence the story of Gilgamesh has been called "the finest surviving epic poem from any period until the appearance of Homer's *Iliad*" (Sandars 8). Thus the story stands at the fountainhead of Near Eastern and European literature, and some have postulated an influence on Hebrew legend and Babylonian and Greek mythology (Sandars 18, 44-46).

It is not surprising that Silverberg was attracted to the epic of Gilgamesh, not only because of his interest in archaeology, but also because, as James Gunn has suggested, "*Gilgamesh's* concerns are those of science fiction" (RTSF 6). Indeed, Gunn includes a brief sketch of the epic in a discussion of the origins of science fiction (RTSF 5-7). Moreover, Silverberg's use of

the Gilgamesh material for a novel follows in the tradition of twentieth-century authors who have re-imagined highly revered stories from Greek myths (Mary Renault, Robert Graves) and Arthurian tales (Rosemary Sutcliffe, T. H. White, Mary Stewart, Thomas Berger, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Bernard Cornwell). Silverberg's novel is one of the first to treat the saga of Gilgamesh.

In *Gilgamesh the King*, Silverberg makes use of the central conflicts of the Gilgamesh story, but he naturalizes the supernatural trappings of the poems. Of course, the Sumerian gods—who seem to be an early sketch for the Hellenic pantheon—exist in the novel as myths and as powerful psychological influences; but the fictional events remain entirely naturalistic. As in the poems, however, the action of the novel, narrated effectively by Gilgamesh himself, is given a nicely symmetrical shape.

The novel begins with Gilgamesh's description of the ceremonial burial of his father, King Lugalbanda, and the boy's questions about the nature of death, to which he receives the standard answers of Sumerian myth. The desire for an understanding of the meaning of death continues to haunt Gilgamesh, and in the latter third of the novel it becomes the dominant theme of his life.

Despite the consolations of Sumerian religion, Gilgamesh remains unconvinced, even early in life, that human mortality can be easily defeated. From this opening, the novel moves rapidly through Gilgamesh's early years to the triumphs of his kingship: constructing the walls of Uruk; defeating its enemies; the conquest of the legendary warrior Enkidu, with whom he forms a strong bond of friendship; Gilgamesh's greater conquest of the mountain demon (actually a volcano, which he cools and plugs); and finally his importation of cedar to Uruk.

Though Gilgamesh is supposed to be an absolute monarch, his power is often contested by the priestess of the goddess, Inanna (or Ishtar), and his triumphs turn to tragedy when, at the height of his power, his arrogance causes him to scorn the priestess's offer of marriage. Since this priestess is also considered the incarnation of the goddess, or the feminine principle, Gilgamesh's demonstration of hubris is bound to create suffering. At this point, parallels between Gilgamesh and Homer's Achilles, the hero of the *Iliad*, who is similarly flawed by arrogance and a terrible wrath, begin to appear. After the city is placed under a curse by Inanna, Gilgamesh and Enkidu are forced to kill the goddess's sacred bull in order to restore their authority. In their effort to close the gate to the "underworld," a system of catacombs beneath the city, Enkidu goes into the tunnels and gains a mortal wound, or at any rate, he returns under an oppression of the spirit, and falls ill with a mysterious malady (perhaps tetanus acquired on his trip beneath the earth).

The result is the major tragedy of Gilgamesh's life. Despite all of Gilgamesh's resources, Enkidu wastes away and dies, leaving Gilgamesh with a

renewed sense of outrage over human mortality. As Gilgamesh remarks, "Seeing him in mortal terror I was reminded of my own mortality, which haunted me like a knife in my flesh" (GTK 217). Clearly, the grief of Gilgamesh is a psychological wound akin to that suffered by Homer's Achilles when his friend Patrokles is killed by Hector.

In the final third of the novel, Gilgamesh becomes an existential searcher who takes a long and humbling journey to the supposed founts of Sumerian wisdom in an effort to find a way of overcoming death. His pilgrimage to find the supposedly immortal Ziusudra (the Sumerian Noah, also known as Utnapishtim), who had survived the legendary flood, takes him to a dirty little village on an island in the Persian Gulf, where Gilgamesh learns that the immortality of Ziusudra was a myth.

Yet the tragic movement of the novel does not conclude until after Gilgamesh's return to Uruk. As Gilgamesh approaches the city he learns that his former lover, the priestess Inanna, has seized power in his absence, and he narrowly evades a plot to poison him. Knowing that the conflict with the priestess can never be happily resolved, he enters the temple of the priestess and kills her with his knife, in order to regain his kingship.

Though the later years of his reign are marked by constructive acts, these are recounted quickly in the final chapter, where Silverberg allows his hero to voice his reflections on life. This amounts to the familiar modern position of accepting one's mortality, and doing one's best while one lives. As the mature king puts it, "I have come to understand the truth, which is that the escape from death lies not in potions and magic, but in the performance of one's task. That way lies calmness and acceptance" (GTK 317).

Whatever we think of the title character as a source of wisdom, *Gilgamesh the King* is a solidly constructed novel, for the world of archaic Sumeria is plausibly presented in vividly described ceremonial and battle scenes. Moreover, this is perhaps the one work where Silverberg was able to draw directly on his early reading of H.D.F. Kitto's classic study of Greek tragedy (1939). Though Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the priestess are passionate characters who are almost larger than life, the powerful bond between Gilgamesh and Enkidu and the love-hate conflict between Gilgamesh and the priestess are the materials from which tragedy is forged.

Incidentally, the friendship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu is a central theme of Silverberg's source, but it is explicitly described as not homoerotic by Gilgamesh (155). Their relationship was based on mutual admiration for each other's strength and prowess, and they lived in a time when the relationships between men and women were not romanticized as greatly as today.

Whatever we want to make of this, it is more important to understand that the tone of the final sections of *Gilgamesh the King* is somber and tragic. While the novel fails to achieve a Homeric or Aeschylean level, Gilgamesh is a prototype of modern man, in his restless energy and his melancholic

discovery of mortality. Clearly Silverberg's novel is a strong work. Its hero deserves a better fate than Baird Searles's obtuse dismissal in a review in *Asimov's* as "the stereotypical superhero—dumb, vain, and always ready to sock somebody." (February 1985). Silverberg would later respond to such comments by placing Gilgamesh in a parody adventure that satirizes the superheroes of fantasy.

Not pleased with his foray into historical fiction, Silverberg returned to novels of the future with *Tom O'Bedlam* (1985), a novel richly supported by literary allusion much like the award-winning novella, "Sailing to Byzantium," which appeared in the same year. *Tom O'Bedlam* is undoubtedly one of Silverberg's most eccentric works, and for those wondering about the direction of Silverberg's career, this enigmatic ambiguous novel provided few clues. To be sure, the novel contains some casual sex and an impressive picture of a blighted future California, but its main focus is the dream visions of the title character, which become part of a communal illusion.

Silverberg's title is the name of an anonymous visionary "mad song" composed in Elizabethan times, and attributed to a "bedlamite," or wandering lunatic who has escaped from Bethlehem Hospital in London. Excerpts from the poem, which contains a powerful phantasmagoria of imagery, introduce each section of the novel.

The song has strong associations with Shakespeare's *King Lear*, where Gloucester's fugitive son, Edgar, assumes the disguise of "Poor Tom," a bedlamite, to join the deranged Lear and his servants, Kent and the jester, on their wanderings on the heath during the storm. In his disguise as Poor Tom, a kind of "holy fool," Edgar persuades the blind Gloucester, his despairing father, to commit a mock suicide. After Gloucester's "survival," Edgar convinces him to accept the anguish of life without complaint. In this, Edgar, the pretended madman and visionary, teaches the "sane" Gloucester to "see" despite the latter's blindness.

Since Lear's ravings, initially caused by his disappointment over rejection by his daughters, contain visionary truth in the form of a powerful indictment of human hypocrisy and ingratitude, the play endows the poetry of madness with a special aura of credibility. Not only in *Lear* but in much Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, the speeches and songs of characters who are supposed to be mad take on the mantle of prophetic truth. This tradition of the visionary truth of the "mad song" was carried on by such Romantic poets as Blake and Yeats, and one of its themes was articulated in Emily Dickinson's lyric assertion that "much madness is divinest sense."⁷

In Silverberg's novel, the tormented vagabond Tom wanders the wasted California world of 2103, dreaming visions of beneficent extraterrestrials, and a "Green World" of fertility as an alternative to earth. The imagery of Tom's visions seems lifted from a medieval dream vision, or perhaps some fantasy film depicting friendly extraterrestrials. Since Tom's environment has been devastated by the "Dust War," which has turned whole states in the

middle of America into a "dead zone," the society about him is tattered and unraveling, dispirited by the decay of technology and dismal prospects for the future. This is another version of the retrogressive future Silverberg had portrayed in *Shadrach in the Furnace*; but in place of a humanitarian deliverer, like Shadrach, the novel offers us only Tom's mad visions. The visions may reflect reality, since others besides Tom find the same imagery in their dreams, and the Majipoor books assume that advanced technology can influence the dreams of a populace. However, the visions may be only a collective delusion of the inhabitants of a declining society. Or again, Tom's telepathic power may kill, or it may send people to the Green World or the Sphere of Light. On this point, the novel remains ambiguous, following classic modernist patterns, although readers may well disbelieve in his extraterrestrials. While finding a bizarre religious vision in the novel, Colin Manlove in a perceptive essay has noted that Silverberg fills the novel with "a sense of endings" (RSMT 127). Moreover, as Manlove comments, the novel is pervaded with the presence "of ambiguity and duality" (RSMT 135). In fact, the entire novel may be seen as a kind of "mad song."

Commenting on Yeats's Crazy Jane poems, Harold Bloom observes that "the mad song's singer must present neither a tragic heroism nor an ironic reversal of orthodox values, but simply the wisdom of a more radical wholeness than reason, nature, and society combine to permit us" (*Yeats* 400). Certainly Tom's visions provide an image of "a more radical wholeness" than anything else in his world offers. Reading Silverberg's novel without remembering the tradition of visionary truth in the "mad song," and the prophecies of "holy fools," might convince a reader that its plot and characters are insane. However, if we realize that Tom wears the mantle of the holy fool, then we can accept the novel as Silverberg's extended version of the "mad song," in which, as Robert Killheffer argues, the characters "embrace this loss of self, rush toward it, and the conclusion is a Utopian vision of extraterrestrial paradise" (NYROSF 14). From such a perspective, *Tom O'Bedlam* is an impressive novel about visionary illusion and the conditions that spawn it.

By contrast, Silverberg's next major science fiction novel, *Star of Gypsies* (1986), focuses on craftiness rather than madness, as Silverberg returned to the study of political intrigue—one of his strengths. Set in a distant future of space travel and intergalactic trade, the novel describes the Machiavellian political strategy of Yakoub, a gypsy king, who uses his experience and wiliness to defeat an attempt to seize power by his amoral illegitimate son, Shandor. The conflict shows Yakoub as a master of sophisticated uses of political power in the service of humanitarian responsibility, although the highest value Yakoub serves is the survival of the gypsy people and the preservation of their identity.

Yakoub has a fierce pride in the ethnic survival of the gypsy culture, and most of his contempt for Shandor arises from his belief that Shandor lacks the cleverness traditionally associated with gypsy tradition. This culture,

which Yakoub calls "the Rom," defines itself by its relation to the "Gaje" or non-gypsy world, against which it has been obliged to use all its cunning in order to survive. Indeed, in the homogenized future world of "the empire" that Silverberg imagines, only gypsydom has managed to sustain its ancient identity.

It is not surprising that Silverberg should treat gypsy culture with such knowledge and affection. There are strong parallels between the gypsy nation and the Jewish people, both of whom have been subject to persecution and numerous diasporas, and have assumed the role of nomadic outsiders in other societies. Both have been forced to fight desperately with guile and courage for their survival, and both have created enormous treasures of folklore not easily available to the uninitiated. Both have been the targets of ideologues preaching an illusory vision of "ethnic purity"; finally, both were notorious victims of Nazi genocide, although the Nazi campaign against gypsies has been less publicized.

Of course, there have been some important differences between these peoples, too. Judaism, despite being hampered by savage Christian persecution, has been more successful at overcoming ethnic hostility and finding acceptance and success in the post-Enlightenment world of Western Europe and North America. Also Judaism is a culture devoted to the written tradition, whereas gypsydom has tended to perpetuate itself by an oral tradition in Romany, a language that few read or speak. Even the origins of gypsy culture have been the subject of controversy. Yakoub provides his own dubious answer by identifying the source, not as a province of ancient India, but as "Romany Star," a mythic sun and planet system.

At any rate, Yakoub's fierce dedication to the tradition of gypsy cunning sustains his effort to defeat Shandor and guides his wily intrigues with the court of the empire. Taken hostage by his ambitious son, Yakoub turns the captivity to his advantage, using it as a more Machiavellian Gandhi would. During his ordeal he is strengthened by memories of past successes, and by anecdotes of survival and trickery enshrined in gypsy tradition. In short, Yakoub may be Silverberg's finest creation of a trickster hero, an archetype that has fascinated him from the beginning of his career.

However, Yakoub's success as a first-person narrator also helps to define the novel's limitations. Compared with the narrator, the other characters seem limited: Shandor, for all his ruthlessness, does not seem a menacing threat; Damiano, Yakoub's cousin, has a few vivid moments, but remains distinctly a secondary figure; Syluisc, Yakoub's favorite mistress, is a memorable character, but she is presented only through Yakoub's memories. Nor does the novel achieve the dramatic momentum it might have attained. Despite the length of Yakoub's ordeal, its outcome seems too obviously calculated in advance.

In order to succeed, of course, Yakoub must scheme to defeat his son, and the novel affirms Silverberg's persistent conviction that political respon-

sibility must override personal feelings (a theme of *Valentine Pontifex* that recurs in *At Winter's End*). Although Yakoub expresses regret over the pleasure he felt in begetting Shandor, Yakoub might have achieved a more tragic stature if his relationship with Shandor had been closer. Nevertheless, within its own limited terms, *Star of Gypsies* is lively and effectively crafted. If for no other distinction, *Star of Gypsies* is notable for Silverberg's knowledge of gypsy culture and for his brilliant depiction of the memorable gypsy leader.

Some of Silverberg's lesser efforts in the eighties and early nineties were expended on time travel tales. The imaginative possibilities of this theme have always stimulated Silverberg, as far back as *Stepsons of Terra*. In addition, his fascination with archaeology has provided an additional impetus for writing about journeys through time without belaboring the question of their scientific feasibility. Not surprisingly, Silverberg now returned to this tradition, publishing a lively young adult novel, a picaresque adventure fantasy, and a pair of reflective novellas in which characters travel to legendary past eras.

Of these books, *Project Pendulum* (1987), aimed at the juvenile market, is probably the slightest. The story begins, however, with an original premise: two twenty-three-year-old twins, Sean and Eric, travel backward and forward in time on scientific missions, interspersed with brief returns to the present. Their itineraries do not overlap, and, since their trips began with five-minute jaunts and gradually grew longer, there seems little risk of their getting involved with the eras they visit. However, the length of their visits increases dramatically with each trip, so that suspense develops. Silverberg adds an unexpected touch when he gives Sean a quasi-mystical epiphany near the novel's end, but whether this event emerges logically from the action is questionable.

Aside from the novelty of the premise, *Project Pendulum* offers little fresh in characterization or plot. The book does a competent job of creating for young readers an awareness of the age of the earth and the length and variety of human history. Essentially Silverberg provides a series of vivid snapshots of the past; but, although ably written, the novel seems to exploit a gimmicky premise. Nevertheless, *Project Pendulum* succeeds for young readers in offering a provocative entry into the turmoil of the past.

In another time travel exercise, Silverberg brought Gilgamesh out of the Sumerian past to swashbuckle in later eras in two novellas that were combined and enlarged by additional narrative to make a picaresque novel, *To the Land of the Living* (1990). Since at least one reviewer had mistaken Gilgamesh for a swaggering adventurer of the Conan variety, it would seem that Silverberg here offered an amusing parody of the Robert E. Howard tradition. Indeed, the first section of the novel, "Gilgamesh in the Out-back," conceived for a commercial series called "Heroes in Hell," and later

published in *Asimov's* (July 1986), presents a fictional afterworld of the dead, with a caricature of Howard as a repressed homosexual, barely able to suppress his lust for H. P. Lovecraft. Gilgamesh, however, remains an unapologetic heterosexual, although he devotes his existence in this Elysium to his obsessive search for Enkidu. At any rate, this amusing tale was popular enough to win Silverberg another Hugo.

Obviously enjoying the fun of writing an old-fashioned adventure story again, Silverberg followed this novella of Gilgamesh in the afterlife with another, "The Fascination of the Abomination" (*Asimov's*, July 1987), in which Gilgamesh visits a section of hell containing a comic scoundrel called Herod of Judea (supposedly a descendant of the historical Herods) and encounters the demonic Calandola, the cannibal chieftain from *Lord of Darkness*. Both novellas were combined as the first part of *To the Land of the Living*; in the second half, Gilgamesh escapes from Calandola's underworld accompanied by the wily Herod, eventually finds Enkidu and New Uruk, and then journeys to contemporary New York where he has other adventures, including being mistaken for an Iranian terrorist.

Although *To the Land of the Living* lowers Gilgamesh from the heroic level of *Gilgamesh the King* to a picaresque adventurer in a mythological farce, this sequel is an entertaining performance. Indeed, *To the Land of the Living* may be one of the funnier novels of the genre in recent years.

However, Silverberg turned from robust humor to his characteristic elegant irony in two short time travel novellas, *Letters from Atlantis* (1992) and *Thebes of the Hundred Gates* (1991). Narrated in a quiet and contemplative tone, these works demonstrate Silverberg's knowledge of archaeology and ability to evoke a vanished past.

In the more imaginative effort, *Letters from Atlantis*, a member of a twenty-first-century time travel agency, Roy Colton, is reduced to a disembodied presence and sent into the mind of Prince Ram of Atlantis. His vantage point allows him to describe the legendary island empire (on a large volcanic island in the central Atlantic) as it might have existed before the dawn of recorded history. Colton's account, sent in letters to his fiancée on a similar mission in Asia, gradually evokes the image of an impressive but doomed civilization. In sharp contrast to the tribal societies of prehistoric Europe, Silverberg's imaginary "Athilan" is a stately world with impressive architecture and a highly developed social organization, centered in a monarch who, in Byzantine fashion, is both high priest and head of state. A casual reference to "Romany Star" (LFA 66) links the novel with *Star of Gypsies*, offering a hint that Silverberg's Athilan originated with a migration from the world that was the imputed source for gypsy culture. The narrative also implies that refugees from the Athilan catastrophe created the origins of the ancient civilizations in Egypt and Sumeria.

An important feature of the epistolary narrative style is its possibilities for suspense, since the first-person narrator is not aware of the story's outcome

until his final letter. Not only is Colton mystified by the actions of the prince whose mind he inhabits, but the reader is encouraged to wonder if Colton will survive the fall of the Athilan kingdom. The prince's discovery of the time traveler (whom he thinks is a demon possessing his mind) produces additional suspense, and dramatic irony results from Colton's revelation to Prince Ram of the impending volcanic eruption that will doom Athilan. Declining to leave his people, the prince accepts the fate of his world with tragic stoicism. So Colton returns to his era with a deeper awareness of the human condition.

While *Letters from Atlantis* is a fine product of the historical imagination, *Thebes of the Hundred Gates* uses time travel and historical reconstruction with slighter effect. For one thing, the plot of this novel is predictable. Once again the author sends out an inexperienced time traveler to visit an ancient world; but this time the purpose is to bring back two members of the Time Service who have been missing for twenty years in the Thebes of ancient Egypt. Although the protagonist Davis journeys to Egypt of the Eighteenth Dynasty without mishap, and eventually meets the missing time travelers, he is unsuccessful in bringing them back because they have chosen to continue living in the time of the Pharaohs. Predictably, the two do not want to relinquish positions in Egypt that give them prominence: the missing woman has become Nefret, a priestess of Isis, while her male colleague has become the royal astronomer. Ironically, instead of returning, they make Davis a captive in the past to prevent him from betraying them.

Although Silverberg describes the world of ancient Egypt plausibly, his romantic reconstruction of a historical city required less imaginative effort than his invention of ancient Atlantis. Moreover, there is little drama in this short novel of ancient Thebes. Nevertheless, Silverberg gives literary and historical enrichment to time travel tales.

In addition to his massive prose effort in short fiction, time travel tales, historical novels, and novels of the future, Silverberg maintained his reputation as a disciplined and industrious professional by undertaking collaborative efforts. One such collaborative enterprise joined his energies with those of his talented wife, Karen Haber. Although they collaborated as editors, and on short fiction, their primary effort was *The Mutant Season* (1989), the first novel in a series that has been continued by Haber. Another major enterprise for Silverberg was the expansion of three celebrated Asimov stories into novels.

The Mutant Season, describing a twenty-first-century earth where talented mutants face discrimination, based on a slight 1973 story by Silverberg, seems to owe a great deal to Haber. The novel is fraught with melodrama and political intrigue, reminiscent of the novels of Silverberg's earliest period, but the major characters are mostly young women. Moreover, the style is uneven and surprisingly unadorned, as a review by Lynn Williams noted

(SFFA1990 440). Indeed, there are few literary allusions and less stylistic irony than we might expect from Silverberg working alone. Finally, there are many passionate sexual encounters, which are entertainingly described; but these are presented with considerable intensity from the feminine point of view, which had not been characteristic of Silverberg's treatment of sex in previous novels. Clearly, the influence of Haber is strong in this book, as Silverberg's preface indicates (MS ix-xi). Although the novel moves swiftly, it is a minor work.

Silverberg's collaborations with Asimov engaged more of his energy. Unfortunately, *Nightfall* (1990), an expansion of Isaac Asimov's classic 1941 *Astounding* story into a full-length disaster novel, is a disappointment. Both Asimov and Silverberg are given credit as collaborative authors, but it appears that the expansion of the short story is largely Silverberg's, prompted in part by the desire to do homage to Asimov's story on the fiftieth anniversary of its publication. However, the resulting novel is a rather tame performance, despite presenting the drama of a society's collapse.

Asimov's brief story described a scientifically advanced society on a distant planet, Kalgash, where six suns provide perpetual daylight. However, when peculiar astronomical circumstances cause the suns to set and bring a period of darkness, the society of Kalgash surrenders to mindless terror at the advent of an experience never before encountered. This ending supplied an ironic comment on Emerson's romantic aphorism that people would regard the stars with unadulterated wonder if permitted to see them only once in a thousand years, a statement used for the story's epigraph.

As a short story, Asimov's "Nightfall" is justly celebrated, and it has remained popular for decades. It may be considered a fable about the terrifying return of superstition and frenetic emotionalism to a society ruled by rationalism, an interpretation that is quite perceptive.⁸ However, its evocation of unreasoning terror may have seemed more relevant in the depression-weary America of 1941, haunted by fears aroused by the advent of World War II. That society had seen a panic sweep the East Coast three years earlier when Orson Welles had broadcast his adaptation of *The War of the Worlds*, and was justifiably apprehensive about the nation's drift toward involvement in World War II.

In contrast to that anxious time, the decade of the nineties is more familiar with disaster scenarios and post-disaster stories of social reconstruction. Though the Asimov-Silverberg novel version may have relevance today, its depiction of disaster and the efforts to respond to it seem familiar stuff. Silverberg tries to enlarge the story's scope by introducing the force of religious fanaticism, as well as a widespread neo-Luddite reaction to science, but *Nightfall* remains a predictable story following the rationalist Theremon's adventures during the period of darkness.

The novel ends with the unexpected irony of Theremon's final discovery that the religious cult of the charismatic Mondior follows a television image

rather than a real person. Moreover, Theremon learns that the cult is a means for its clever pragmatic director, Folimun, to guide Kalgash toward a restoration of peace and order. In short, Folimun is the unacknowledged leader of Kalgash's "societal quest" for a renewed civilization (Kagle 79). Such a conclusion is reminiscent of Silverberg's clever revelation of the true purpose of the Vorster cult in *To Open the Sky*, two decades earlier, but it no longer has much shock effect.

Despite its smooth writing and dramatic incident, *Nightfall* fails to develop memorable themes. Perhaps the world of Kalgash—except for six suns, a thinly disguised version of earth—is not conceived in sufficient detail; or perhaps this tale of social collapse seems all too predictable to initiated readers. However, Silverberg was more successful with his other expansions of Asimov stories.

In these collaborative efforts, Silverberg was returning to the mode of a science fiction master who had greatly influenced him. An expansion of Asimov's story, *The Ugly Little Boy* (1992), is an impressive novel. In the popular original story (one of Asimov's works that creates a strong emotional response), a research institute brings a boy forward from the Neanderthal era in order to study him in a controlled environment. Edith Fellowes, the kind but plain woman chosen as his nurse, develops a strong maternal relationship with him. Before long, she feels pity for Timmy, and realizing that he is only an object of study to the scientists at the private laboratory where he is virtually a prisoner, she helps him return to his barbaric past. According to James Gunn, this 1958 story is one of Asimov's "best-known and best-loved" (IA 101), but Gunn has reservations about its ending. While Gunn finds the story somewhat appealing, he raises the question of whether the nurse can survive "in a lonely and unrewarding life" in the Pleistocene epoch, and, discounting Edith's maternal feelings, he argues that the story is an irrational departure from logical science fiction (IA 102).

In Silverberg's expansion of the story, the characterizations are enlarged and deepened. Edith Fellowes becomes a stronger character, although she must overcome her submerged love for Gerald Hoskins, the kind but detached director of Stasis Laboratories. Her decision to assist Timmy in an escape to his own time comes after her realization that Hoskins, Timmy, and she can never really become a family, although their relationship has seemed familial to her.

Silverberg also develops two other characters realistically, with a touch of satire: these are Marianne Levien, the ambitious research psychologist who resents Hoskins's rejection of her as Timmy's nurse; and Mannheim, a power-hungry advocate of children's rights. Readers should have no trouble recognizing Levien as a nasty but realistic portrait of a child psychologist who cares more about publication than children; and Mannheim, the

spokesman for a cause whose real importance he has forgotten, seems as credible as the stories in yesterday's newspaper.

However, Silverberg has enlarged the novel by portraying Timmy's ritualized tribal world in the Neanderthal era vividly and sympathetically. Since this world, though remarkably primitive, seems more attractive in some ways than twentieth-century society, readers can feel sympathy with Edith in her decision to return Timmy to his people. The problem of Edith's survival in the Pleistocene epoch, which bothered James Gunn (an unrelenting rationalist), is also solved: Edith, who has shown convincing maternal qualities, is accepted on her arrival from the future as an incarnation of the "Great Mother." In describing the gradual development of the emotional bond between Edith and Timmy, Silverberg has turned Asimov's short story into a memorable novel. Edith is, in fact, one of the most credible women characters in Silverberg's canon.

For the third and final collaborative work of Silverberg and Asimov, *The Positronic Man* (1993), Silverberg had a longer and more detailed story to enlarge. Moreover, whereas "Nightfall" was an early Asimov story and "The Ugly Little Boy" came from his middle period, Asimov's fine novella, "The Bicentennial Man," was published in 1976 and represents one of the closing tales in Asimov's long future history devoted to robots. In "The Bicentennial Man," Asimov had confronted the question latent in the earlier robot stories, but seldom faced directly: Can beings with artificial intelligence ever be considered human, or, more simply put, become human (and what is the definition of being human)? This is a question that other authors had raised regarding androids, such as in Clifford Simak's *Time and Again* (1953), Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1969), and Silverberg himself in *Tower of Glass*.

Perhaps Asimov's treatment of the issue was a bit tardy, but "The Bicentennial Man" is an excellent performance. Asimov's novella shows the gradual growth of Andrew Martin over his two-hundred-year life, until the answer must be given in the affirmative. This time, Gunn considers the answer rational and the work "a fitting conclusion to the robot saga" (IA 76), although of course Asimov went on to write other books connecting the robot stories with his Foundation novels.

In Asimov's original novella, Andrew serves the Martin family faithfully for several generations, developing a deep and abiding love for the daughter of his master, Mandy, or "Little Miss," and gradually learning most of the other familiar human emotions. From the beginning it is clear that Andrew is an "aberration" from the manufacturer's standard robot servant and companion for children, because his positronic brain is capable not only of reason, but also of self-awareness and the power to invent and perfect his creations. Andrew gains fame and fortune because of his work as an artist, but he is also the object of human dislike and envy. Although he seeks to gain acceptance as a human, his talent and his apparent imperviousness to

death create social resistance. Eventually, after choosing to die, like other humans, Andrew is granted legal status as a human. At the close, Andrew does die, in order to confirm his human status: in this act, he experiences two common and essential human emotions, the fear of death and the acceptance of mortality.

In his expansion of "The Bicentennial Man," Silverberg did not need to add depth to Asimov's portrait of Andrew, the positronic man. However, he does round out the portraits of the other major characters, particularly Gerald Martin and his daughter Amanda, who form the closest bonds with Andrew. Their descendants are also delineated with imaginative detail. Moreover, Silverberg does much to heighten the irony of the story, particularly in handling the attitudes of the managers of the corporation that designed Andrew, and in depicting the complex human attitudes involved in Andrew's fight for legal status as a human. Here Silverberg's additions are valuable. Despite Asimov's hardy rationalism and robust sense of humor, he was seldom able to match Silverberg's considerable talents as a satirist.

All in all *The Positronic Man* is a satisfying novel. Although it lacks the dramatic quality of *The Ugly Little Boy*, and although Silverberg had a strong story to start with, this collaborative effort gives a larger social relevance to Asimov's novella. To sum up, then, the final two of Silverberg's three novellistic expansions of Asimov's stories are considerable achievements.

In the later eighties, Silverberg began a series about a post-disaster earth many millennia hence, first presented in *At Winter's End* one of his finest novels. In general, *At Winter's End* has been received as an imaginative and satisfying work, and Silverberg himself holds it in considerable esteem.⁹ In this novel Silverberg inaugurated a study of the historical process of the renewal of a civilization; its characterizations and careful study of cultural process make *Nightfall* look thin by contrast.

At Winter's End describes the emergence from caves of a tribe of intelligent simians, their attempt to re-discover the science and culture of the past, and their establishment of a progressive society in the open air. This is the theme of the "societal quest" defined by Kagle (79-85) and now developed on an epic scale.

A brief summary of setting and characters is in order here. The setting is the earth 700,000 years in the future. A tribe of intelligent simians, "The People" of the story, are survivors of a disaster brought on by the "death stars." The nature of the "death stars" is left ambiguous: either the phrase refers to a final nuclear war; or perhaps it describes meteors and comets from the Oort Cloud that have descended on the earth and created havoc. The people have only legend to guide them, and the truth awaits discovery by their scientists. Clearly, only those who retreated to underground caves have survived. However, some way into the story, we realize that these survivors are in fact the descendants of monkeys or apes who have evolved to

a human level of consciousness, perhaps aided by mutation induced by radiation.

At first, we may be inclined to think of the novel's famous precursor about a future populated by simians, the celebrated film *Planet of the Apes* (1968); but Silverberg's novel describes a different world and the focus of his story is on the creation of a new civilization, instead of satirizing the contemporary world, or prophesying its destruction. Avoiding melodrama and sensationalism, Silverberg narrates the departure of The People from the caves, their migration to a new territory, and their efforts to establish a permanent city. Throughout the novel, the narrative tone and its characterizations are handled with maturity and restraint.

Since the tribe at the center of the action has a limited command of human literature and tradition, Silverberg must exercise rhetorical restraint. As the resources of literary allusion are not available, and the society described is technologically limited, Silverberg is forced to rely on a sparing use of detail and a disciplined tone.

Characterization in *At Winter's End* is realistic and three dimensional. Except for the extrapolation of a future world, and one form of telepathic communion, Silverberg presents an essentially naturalistic narrative, eschewing melodrama. The major characters are effectively drawn, though some are recognizable types from earlier novels. The strong and well-conceived feminine characters mark a major advance in Silverberg's work. These include Koshmar, the tribe's leader, who seizes the initiative, decides to break with tradition, and brings the people out of the caves into the open air; her daughter Taniane, who rebels against her mother, but is finally reconciled to her, and assumes the mantle of leadership herself; and Torlyri, Koshmar's closest friend and confidante, who becomes estranged from Koshmar over a question of principle.

The most important masculine character is Hresh, the young visionary, another of Silverberg's youthful prodigies. Hresh is both a seeker after knowledge and the keeper of the tribe's history; but his strong imagination conjures up the plan that saves Koshmar's people in the climactic and most decisive action of the book. Hresh's romantic idealism also contributes to the novel's complications, for the slowly developing romantic relationship between Hresh and the strong-willed Taniane is one of Silverberg's more mature treatments of erotic attraction.

Another well drawn character is Harruel, the frustrated warrior, whose gradual decline into barbarism leads him to commit rape. Although not as tragic in nature, numerous minor figures are also credibly portrayed. Indeed, Silverberg handles a large cast here with seemingly effortless ease. Significantly, *At Winter's End* gives a greater prominence to feminine characters and to a wide variety of age levels than earlier Silverberg novels.

Two features of this future world demonstrate Silverberg's inventiveness and thoroughness: the tribe's mythology, which involves five divinities

(more or less familiar gods under different names), and the limited telepathic communion provided by "twining." The latter ritual is a variation on a recurring theme in Silverberg's fiction. This telepathic "twining" is another instance of his attempt to portray a form of telepathic sharing of psyches as a means of overcoming, or at least lessening, the ancient human problem of the isolation of the self. Here the motif is treated carefully as a nurturing ritual that may help to heal the wound of isolation rather than being offered uncritically as a miraculous solution (like the unconvincing drug experience of *A Time of Changes*).

Though it moves slowly, covering nearly a generation, the action of *At Winter's End* unfolds with unforced smoothness. Drama seems to arise without contrivance from the events of the narrative. The novel begins with the tribe deciding to leave their ancient underground haven, and emerging into the "new springtime of the earth," logically enough somewhere near the Mississippi (where there are caves in the river bluffs and the nearby Ozark plateau). Their emergence is followed by a long trek west to an area near the Pacific where they find the ruins of the old city of Vengiboneeza (San Francisco?).

The next section describes various struggles for power while Hresh devotes his energy to learning the secrets of the technology buried in Vengiboneeza. (Hresh's archaeological digging in the ruined city recapitulates a major theme in Silverberg's career: like Hresh, Silverberg was a youthful prodigy who found success partly as a result of investigating archaeological studies of ancient ruins.) Finally, after the tribe solidifies its internal order, choosing the values of Koshmar over those of Harruel, it is forced to face an external threat—its potential extinction by the march of the hjjk-men, a communal life form dominated by a herd mentality. In the tribe's defeat of the hjjk warriors, it is not physical strength like Harruel's that proves decisive, but the intelligence that Hresh and Taniane bring to a conflict where the odds appear to be overwhelmingly against The People.

Despite its dramatic conclusion, much of the conflict of *At Winter's End* is concerned, not with physical action, but with intellectual discovery. A fitting climax to the theme of Hresh's research comes when he is able to open the records of Vengiboneeza and learn, apparently from videotapes, how the earlier civilization fell. This moment provides a major epiphany in the novel, and emphasizes an important theme of Silverberg's mature fiction: in order to know where we are and to build a stable civilization, we must understand the past. At the novel's conclusion, the tribe has established a city-state and appears to be on the way to developing a higher civilized order.

At Winter's End recapitulates many of Silverberg's most cherished themes, yet it presents them from a new perspective. The concentration on the rebuilding of a civilization provides an epic conflict, the founding of a civilization—and one which science fiction has often handled too casually.

Clearly, however, *At Winter's End* is a novel of impressive stature—rich in invention, solid in characterization, and memorable in incident.

Considering the excellence of *At Winter's End*, it should not be surprising that *The New Springtime* (1990) seems anti-climactic. Len Hatfield is probably representative of the readers who assessed this sequel with faint praise as “another moderately interesting exploration of human frailty and hope” (SFFA1990 441). To be sure, *The New Springtime* sets up a promising cultural conflict between the people of the City of Dawinno and their rival, the City of Yissou to the north, with the most serious threat to the developing civilization being an external force, the seductive doctrine of the “nest-mother” of the hjjk people, who lurk nearby.

Much of the psychological conflict turns on the generational conflict between the world views of Taniane, the leader of the City of Dawinno, and her daughter, whose youthful romanticism has led her to embrace the gospel of surrender to a mindless and all-embracing love offered by the nest-mother. Embracing the nest-mother's faith would lead to a loss of individualism and an end to progress, and produce at best a social stasis. Clearly, Silverberg is using the hjjk ethos, which derives from the communal heritage of ants and similar insects, to satirize collectivist ideals (including perhaps “new age” emotionalism) that would extinguish individualism.

Nevertheless, the presentation of these conflicts fails to create the drama of the first book, although there is much intrigue and counterintrigue. *The New Springtime* also lacks the sense of innovation and discovery that gave vigor to *At Winter's End*. Silverberg was obviously eager to follow the success of *At Winter's End* with a sequel, and to enlarge the scope of his future history; but *The New Springtime* seems to focus more on the temptations that destroy civilization than on the challenges of building a new world. Although this second novel contains thoughtful writing, it should have devoted more attention to internal societal conflict, and given less time to the external threat of the nest-mother's siren song.

Turning away temporarily from the people of Dawinno, Silverberg imagined an entirely different setting and theme for *The Face of the Waters* (1991). This novel describes an ambitious quest for a permanent home, a quest taking the form of an old-fashioned sea odyssey on the planet Hydros, a world of oceans and islands. Although the hero, Valben Lawler, a doctor and a man of reason, is a reluctant searcher, he and his fellow humans are forced to begin the quest by the indigenous people of the planet, and, thanks to Nid Delagard, an obsessive seeker of power, the journey becomes an ambiguous religious search.

Once again, familiar motifs appear. One is the crime against another race or species. The resident humans are forced to leave their native island, Sorve, because of a conflict with the planet's ocean-dwelling natives, the Gillies. As in earlier novels, the humans are held to be responsible because of their crimes against the Gillies. While most of the Sorve community are innocent,

there have been recurrent acts of human violence in the past, and now one of their number has repeated the old pattern.

Another familiar motif appears in Delagard's drive, that of a powerful man with a sense of destiny, who constantly tries to dominate the fleet of humans obliged to look for a new dwelling. Finally, we have the conflicts between this leader's obsession with the will to power, and the opposition of the person of reason, in this case Lawler.

As a Conradian sea story and as the study of development of a romantic relationship between Lawler and Silverberg's determined heroine Sundira Thane, the novel is quite entertaining. The characterization of Thane also continues Silverberg's recent emphasis on placing strong-willed women at the center of his story. In short, *The Face of the Waters* has much to recommend it.

However, as the description of an epic religious quest for the island known as "The Face of the Waters," the novel may create a mixed response. When the voyagers, reduced to a single ship and their supplies nearly exhausted, reach The Face, we learn that it is a matrix of life on Hydros, a sentient being that spawns the planet's life. as the half insane Father Quillen explains it:

Hydros is a great corporate mind, a collective organism, a single intelligent entity that spans the entire planet. This island which we have come to, this place that we call The Face of the Waters, is a living thing, the brain of the planet. And more than a brain: the central womb of everything is what the Face is. The universal mother from which all life on Hydros flows. (FOTW 332)

In his portrait of "The Face" with a name intended to evoke the creation myth in Genesis, Silverberg attempts to create a numinous and innovative religious symbol, one both renewing tradition and expressing contemporary feeling. Since The Face corroborates evolutionary theory in providing an oceanic source for life, and since it is a feminine matrix or "mother," it may appeal to some current attitudes about religious myth. It also appears to offer a different involvement in a living community from the mindless surrender offered by the nest-mother in *The New Springtime*. The contrasts between these two symbols are important: whereas the nest-mother's communal world involved a surrender of individual consciousness, the communion of selves created by entering The Face provides a union of psyches in which the self retains its individuality.

Unlike the nest-mother, The Face offers more than a release from the burden of selfhood, or a refuge from nature and the ocean. Instead, The Face gives Silverberg's weary seekers an opportunity to enter a community of shared being that will heal the wound of isolation, as well as their alienation from the planet they have adopted. Nevertheless, Lawler, the most sensible of Silverberg's seekers, resists the call of The Face as long as he can.

Despite his loneliness, Lawler fears the loss of his individuality; he also clings to his identity as a terrestrial, which is manifested in his old dream of visiting an earth he has never seen.

After a long inner struggle, Lawler submerges his ego and enters the communion of The Face at the novel's close, whereupon he discovers that he apparently has reached a paradoxical state of belonging to a new communal life while retaining his identity. In his euphoria, he believes he at last has released his grip on his past as the descendant of a terrestrial and become a native of Hydros by merging his being with the planet's source of life.

Although *The Face of the Waters* offers an affirmative conclusion to the voyage of Lawler and his companions, not all will find its resolution convincing. In fact, we may be inclined to question whether the ending fully clarifies the state of mystical union that Lawler and his companions have attained. Moreover, it may be asked if The Face of the Waters is indeed a meaningful religious symbol. It is possible that interpretations of this novel and its importance in the Silverberg canon may be a source of debate for many years. Certainly, however, it is clear that the novel's success depends very much on its value as a study of religious quest. Nevertheless, I would argue that *The Face of the Waters* is one of Silverberg's finest novels.

However we resolve the question, we can see clearly that Silverberg has not abandoned the search for transcendent symbols and meanings that will offer a healing balm for the alienated consciousness that haunts the human condition. Silverberg no longer accepts the simple romantic answers that appealed to him during his third period; but he remains concerned about the psychic divisions and loneliness of modern readers, lost in a cosmos that they find frightening and devoid of meaning.

Silverberg followed *The Face of the Waters* with another novel describing an epic quest, yet the nature of this adventure is entirely different. *Kingdoms of the Wall* (1993) narrates the story of an ascent of a mountainous region that becomes an allegory or metaphor of humanity's journey from savagery and superstition to enlightenment. Silverberg's theme here is conventional in science fiction, one treated rather directly in Robert Heinlein's early "Universe" and more indirectly in the early works of H. G. Wells. Silverberg's reworking of this theme may have been an effort to remind readers that works of religious quest such as *The Face of the Waters* do not require an abandonment of the important values of rationalism. Whatever lands lie beyond the vision of rationalism, Silverberg suggests, humanity should not revert to a mood of obscurantism and barbaric superstition.

In *Kingdoms of the Wall*, the narrator is Poilar Crookleg, a member of a backward tribal society, who chooses to lead a pilgrimage up "the Wall," a range of ridges and mountainous heights that are the sides of Kosa Saag, a great mountain range. Crippled from birth, Poilar has become a kind of village intellectual, but he believes in the legends of glorious religious illu-

mination for those who make the ascent. Commanding a pilgrimage to scale the formidable heights, he shows that his intelligence and strength of will have grown to compensate for physical shortcomings.

Leading a band of forty men and women up the Kosa Saag, Poilar finds ample opportunity to validate his role as leader. The pilgrims pass through a succession of "kingdoms" or tribal fiefs that offer various temptations to abandon the quest. Two of the kingdoms, the realm of ice and the inevitable false paradise of pleasure, are portrayed memorably. At the top of their mountainous ascent, however, the seekers are surprised: they expect to find the "house of the gods," according to traditional myth; but they find no more than contemporary climbers would discover at the summit of Mt. Olympus or any other sacred mountain. What they do discover are a few terrestrial astronauts, marooned there after their starship crashed. This encounter becomes a rude initiation into the world of rationalism and technological thought.

If the novel's ending seems anticlimactic, such an effect was inevitable, given the familiar nature of Silverberg's theme. However, *Kingdoms of the Wall* is vividly and intensely imagined, and Silverberg's characterizations, especially of Poilar and his friend Traben, are skillfully developed. Though the novel is a symbolic tale of humanity's long ascent from naive acceptance of superstition to rationalism, this interpretation should not imply that *Kingdoms of the Wall* is a carefully contrived allegory in the narrow meaning of the term: it is not an intricate pattern in the Spenserian or Bunyan manner in which every character carries some abstract significance. Instead, Silverberg has employed his talents to make *Kingdoms of the Wall* a credible exercise in exploring the heights, enriched with philosophic overtones.

From remote planets, Silverberg returned to earth in the twenty-second century in *Hot Sky at Midnight* (1994), a novel describing life after ecological disaster. The time is 150 years after the breakup of the Soviet Union, and many formerly fertile parts of earth are now deserts because of global warming, although human ingenuity has also brought fertility to desert areas. Despite a ravaged ecosystem, the remaining civilized world of *Hot Sky* is still a "high tech" community, dominated by multinational corporations. *Hot Sky* combines a dismal future like that envisioned in Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968)—and its cinema adaptation as *Blade Runner* (1982)—with a "cyberpunk" world of high tech manipulations similar to that found in the novels of William Gibson. As in many recent science fiction films, the future is a wasteland of barren farmlands and urban squalor, with a society on the verge of anarchy. In the world of *Hot Sky*, the polar ice caps have been melting, so that retrieving an iceberg for its potable water has become a hazardous but lucrative business.

Silverberg's novel focuses on two protagonists, Paul Carpenter, a rogue who tries to outwit the system of corporate-determined salary scales by continually switching jobs; and his friend, Nicholas Rhodes, who is a committed

humanitarian and researcher. Carpenter's cleverness backfires, as often happens in Silverberg's fiction: first he accepts the risky role as commander of a ship reclaiming icebergs, and then he becomes entangled in a terrorist plot to destroy the Samural Corporation's artificial satellite, Valparaiso Nuevo, now ruled by a Latin American dictator. Although he escapes from the satellite before the explosives are detonated, his fellow conspirators, including Jolanda, his lover, are arrested and perish in the blast.

Consumed by guilt and world weariness, Carpenter volunteers for starship duty to search for other habitable planets. Preparation for the expedition requires drastic physiological alterations, including accepting blindness and having one's eyes replaced by artificial sensory devices, but Carpenter has at last developed a conscience. Whether or not the mission is likely to be a suicidal one does not matter to him at the close.

Only one other alternative for humanity on a dying planet is offered: the other protagonist, Nick Rhodes, is pursuing a program of genetic alteration that, if successful, will allow humans to adjust to a poisoned atmosphere and other dangers of the postindustrial era. However, such genetic changes will transform the appearance and form of humanity into species that appear alien.

Silverberg's dystopian vision of the near future does not offer much hope. In *Hot Sky* there is no disenchantment with life or with nature, but rather a concern that technological civilization will soon have ruined or destroyed the conditions that make life tolerable. *Hot Sky at Midnight* is a brilliant extrapolation of a possible ecological nightmare that could occur a couple of centuries in the future. It presents a more believable world than Silverberg's earlier dystopian satire, *The World Inside*, and depicts the sufferings of more sympathetic and perceptive characters.

After this somber dystopian novel, Silverberg's performance in *Starborne* (1996) represents a surprising change of direction. As always, it remains difficult to predict the road Silverberg's fiction will take. *Starborne* is a return to the tradition of the interstellar quest novel, the origins of which go back as far as E. E. Smith's Lensman novels and Heinlein's "Universe" (1941; published in book form with a sequel as *Orphans of the Sky*, 1963). Later, the tradition had been reshaped in various ways by such writers as Poul Anderson (*Tau Zero*, 1971), and more recently by Gregory Benford. However, by now such novels may well seem old-fashioned; but a supposedly unfashionable theme has never prevented Silverberg from reworking a traditional concept.

Starborne describes a long search for habitable worlds by a specially selected crew, who are characterized with economical touches of realism. The novel returns to a favorite motif, telepathic communication between a member of the crew and a sibling on earth. This idea had earlier been used as the basis of the young adult story, *Across a Billion Years*, now Silverberg adapts it tactfully for a more mature audience. The ship's telepath, Noelle,

is blind, with her telepathic powers developed in part as compensation for the deprivation of her chief sense. As a protagonist Noelle provides one of the major points of view: her role as telepath is crucial to the ship's encounter with a strange life form. At the center of the story are Noelle's two relationships: her close bond with a telepathic sister, Yvonne, on earth and her slowly developing erotic relationship with the "year-captain," the commander whose leadership is so effective that he is elected as the perennial leader. This romantic relationship is presented with tact and sensitivity during its slow growth to its passionate consummation in the sexually liberated world of the starship.

However, the novel's most significant theme is Noelle's discovery of mysterious "angelic" intelligences in deep space. Her communion with these presences gives the novel a mystical dimension (although these mysterious beings are presented as natural phenomena). As a result, *Starborne* may be seen as another novel of mystical quest, returning to the spirit of *The Face of the Waters*. As with that novel, questions remain about Noelle's mysterious communion with the angelic beings. After her long communion with them near the novel's end, she learns that they are sentient stars; more important, her psychological communion with the angelic minds infuses her with new energy. Indeed, the blind Noelle gains sight as a result of her merging with this energy. Moreover, similar renewals are granted to the captain and to the rest of the starship crew.

Despite attempts at a technological explanation of these encounters, the depiction of a group of sentient stars that have the power to renew humans through telepathic communion must seem somewhat mystical, and the word "angels" does not seem a bad name for these energy presences. Tradition supports the name of angels, for in medieval lore, angels were actually supposed to work at controlling the spheres and perhaps inhabit them. In Silverberg's speculative novel, the energy beings the starship encounters appear to be a science fiction attempt to visualize those transcendent beings of traditional legend.

Nevertheless, *Starborne*, narrated in a quiet and controlled tone, is an accomplished performance. Whether it is sufficiently realized in fictional terms to be considered a major work is open to question; however, this excursion into romantic mysticism deserves a careful reading.

To turn from the distant reaches of space in *Starborne* to the world of Silverberg's most recent novel, *The Alien Years* (1998), is to drop downward to the earth. As the dedication and an early passage describing Colonel Carmichael's reflections on *The War of the Worlds* make clear, *The Alien Years*, depicting humanity's fifty-year struggle with a superior species, is a work of homage commemorating H. G. Wells's 1898 masterpiece of alien invasion. As such, it also offers a timely treatment of the popular fascination with the idea of visiting aliens, an interest exploited in various nineties films—the silly *Independence Day* (1996), the sardonic *Mars Attacks* (1997),

the clever parody of *Men in Black* (1997), the ambitious *Dark City* (1998), and the adolescent heroism of *Starship Troopers* (1997)—and also treated humorously in a seemingly endless parade of television series. (Surprisingly, *The Alien Years* is also, less obviously, an expression of homage to the work of Robert Heinlein.)

A fictional homage to a science fiction classic is nothing new: paying tributes to two of science fiction's pioneers, Aldiss has paved the way for such novels with *Frankenstein Unbound* (1973), a sequel to Mary Shelley's seminal work, and *An Island Called Moreau* (1981), a salute to Wells's handling of the Frankenstein theme. Certainly *The Alien Years* presents a more thoughtful study of alien conquest of earth than films or television have recently done (in an age of political correctness, aliens must resemble giant worms or insects, although these may adequately represent dehumanizing foes).

At any rate, Silverberg's chief concerns are to show the social impact of continued alien occupation and to describe the long process of a developing human resistance. As Colonel Carmichael perceives, Wells, by allowing his powerful Martians to be defeated by terrestrial bacteria, avoided the question of whether humanity as a species had the strength to resist conquest or to win a "war of the worlds" (AY 10). By making human survival an accident of fate, Wells intended to deflate terrestrial arrogance and humanity's "infinite complacency," to use the term he employs in the first paragraph of *The War of the Worlds*. (However brilliantly he envisioned future disasters, Wells was never particularly subtle about his intentions.) His novel, though obviously successful, leaves certain questions unanswered.

It is worth mentioning some here. Why did the Martians want total destruction of earth's inhabitants—an act of genocide directed against an entire species on a well-populated planet? Supposedly the invaders simply wanted earth's space and resources, but if they were prepared to destroy humanity, had they made preparations for disposal of the resulting death and decay? And why were humanity's responses so feeble and lacking in coordination? Besides, Wells's Martians are defeated by terrestrial bacteria in a remarkably short time. Would a superior species have no medical protection against unexpected plagues? Is Wells's solution to the problem simply a clever biological contrivance devised by a former student of Thomas Henry Huxley?

Well, at any rate, if it is supposed that a superior species did attempt to conquer earth and menace human life, the time needed for humans to defeat it—rather than bacteria—would take more than a short war, with international pilots and a beleaguered president manning jet fighters. The swift routing of enemy aliens depicted in recent films is no doubt addressed to audiences weaned on video games and influenced by memories of the Gulf War. However, Silverberg offers greater realism in *The Alien Years*, describing a fifty-year struggle against the enemy.

Although the theme of human survival is well worn, Silverberg handles it with intellectual seriousness. If his premise of invasion by superior hostile beings is granted—aliens whose intelligence is “vast . . . cool . . . and unsympathetic” to borrow Wells’s words—Silverberg’s extrapolation of earth’s future in *The Alien Years* seems persuasive.

For one thing, Silverberg’s aliens, the Entities, do not need or desire mass destruction. Instead, they subdue earth’s population, first by tampering with the electronic systems necessary for a “high tech” civilization, and then by using telepathic force to cow and intimidate earthlings. Instead of mass destruction they are content to make slave labor of the terrestrials, and otherwise ignore them—except when ill-advised human rebellions produce lethal reprisals, through plague for instance. Somewhat wiser and more pragmatic than Wells’s Martians, Silverberg’s Entities behave, in fact, a little like the ancient Egyptians in their enslavement of the Hebrews.

The Carmichael family of Santa Barbara, who are the central focus of human resistance, are a credibly drawn group, spanning several generations. In some respects, Colonel Anson Carmichael, the patriarch of the family, may be considered an indirect homage to the work of Robert A. Heinlein—whose middle name was Anson, and who published some early stories under the name of “Anson MacDonald.” Old Colonel Carmichael, dedicated to military tradition but with a lively interest in world culture, is an idealized portrait of a soldier and suggests some of the more admirable values (such as courage and resourcefulness) embodied in Heinlein’s fiction (and to some extent the worldview of John W. Campbell). His determination to resist an alien invasion that reduces humanity to the role of a secondary species is reminiscent of the spirit Heinlein expressed in *The Puppet Masters* (1951) and *Starship Troopers* (1959), both of which have been popular enough to stimulate film versions in the 1990s. Colonel Carmichael, who dies long before the aliens leave, is a rather tragic figure, or at least a highly sympathetic one, as he slowly declines on his ranch in the mountains above Santa Barbara, determined not to let the glory of humanity’s past fade away.

Many of the characters in this novel are effectively drawn, notably Borgmann, the renegade hacker who becomes a collaborator with the aliens; Carol, the “new age” wife of a Carmichael, who, believing the aliens to be lovable beings from a Spielberg movie, rushes to join them, but eventually regrets her act; and most memorable of all, Khalid Burke, the abused son of a working-class Englishman and a Pakistani teenager who died in childbirth. Khalid’s stoic mastery of his emotions makes him the human who is the most dangerous to the telepathic entities, since they are unable to discern his hostile intent. It is Khalid’s strength of character and his acceptance, in defiance of the bitter events of his youth, of the will of Allah that delineate him as the novel’s most memorable figure.

In some respects, *The Alien Years* is a family novel, since Colonel Carmichael’s family remain center stage and become the center of human re-

sistance. However, the family is presented with commendable variety; Silverberg avoids having them be idealized carbon copies of the Colonel. The power of the Carmichael family's resistance to alien rule is not diminished by the fact that the aliens apparently choose to leave of their own accord, rather than being driven off by human resistance. It is not the success or failure of the Carmichael spirit that is finally important in the novel, but rather the will to survive and resist, which the family comes to embody.

There is much about *The Alien Years* that is not currently fashionable in mainstream literature, and even less fashionable among academic critics. However, the novel treats its science fictional premises with admirable realism. In sum, *The Alien Years* offers a fine coda to the career of a distinguished science fiction novelist, although that career is far from over.

In the nineties, Silverberg continues to display the fecundity and imaginative strength of his third and fourth periods. Indeed, the Majipoor novels, the Dawinno novels, and the strength of his recent novels suggest that his later career has been misunderstood and undervalued. As fine and accomplished as *Dying Inside* is, the best of the later novels and stories have a solidity and assurance that distinguish the work of an author who is completely the master of his medium and themes.

To be sure, not all readers, including some perceptive critics, have embraced the latest works. As we have noted in this study, Silverberg has often received high critical acclaim, only to have his work dismissed in another decade, or his career written off as another case of a talented author who has surrendered to commercialism. Nevertheless, Silverberg's fiction cannot be disposed of so easily. If negative opinion could kill, then Silverberg the author would appear to have many lives.

At the same time, it is hard to offer a definitive judgment on an author who is still in his prime and likely, with good health, to produce more fine work. Yet we can conclude that Silverberg, though one of the youngest of the generation of science fiction writers who followed the aegis of Heinlein, Asimov, and Bradbury, and entered the field in the fifties, is surely also one of the most talented and successful. Inheriting the romantic tradition of science fiction, and blending it with modernist irony in his third period, Silverberg produced some masterful works. While examining the anguish of modern life, Silverberg also explored some of the alternatives that promised transcendence. Finally, he produced a novel affirming the value of moral action in *Shadrach in the Furnace*.

Returning to the genre in the late seventies, Silverberg also came back in a mature spirit to his original romanticism and created in Majipoor one of the lasting realms of American fantasy. At this point, he might have rested on his achievements, but he continued to pursue his calling as a professional author with integrity and imagination.

Whatever the future of science fiction as a genre, Silverberg's work will occupy an important place in its history and development into a more mature literature. His work as an editor for many publishers, including Arbor House, has also been significant. However, Silverberg's importance cannot be measured merely by his contribution to its history. The author of *The Masks of Time*, *Nightwings*, *Downward to the Earth*, "Sundance," and the stories of *Unfamiliar Territory*, *Dying Inside*, *Shadrach in the Furnace*, *Lord Valentine's Castle*, *Lord of Darkness*, *At Winter's End*, *The Face of the Waters*, and *Hot Sky at Midnight* will be remembered as one of twentieth-century science fiction's greatest talents.

Silverberg's career is by no means complete, for he intends to write at least "five or six" more books (letter to author 4 March 1999). Among these are additional works set in Majipoor, such as the forthcoming *Lord Prestimion*. However, the overall shape of his career has already been defined. In the ascent of his personal Castle Mount, Silverberg has prevailed through tenacity, talent, and for the most part, a speculative intelligence, which has guided him on his existential quests in a spirit of independence from fashionable winds of doctrine. In this journey, he has gained a mastery of motifs and iconography of science fiction—the stuff of which many twentieth-century dreams are made—and transformed it into serious literature.

Notes

CHAPTER 1

1. Jonas's comment appeared in his column of reviews of science fiction in a discussion of "Born with the Dead," in the *New York Times Book Review*, 24 August 1975, 29. The comparison was intended to be favorable and remains useful, although the parallels it suggests have their limitations.

2. These comments are posed as hypothetical queries, but they lurk in the background of many discussions of Silverberg. His novels of the eighties and nineties have not received much serious evaluation; in fact, they are often the subject of light-hearted disparagements, or are damned with faint praise.

One instance that may be representative is a prominent article by Thomas Disch, "Big Ideas and Dead-End Thrills," *Atlantic*, February 1992, 86-94. Here Disch, in the process of ridiculing the science fiction genre, uses LVC (New York: Harper and Row, 1980) as an example of Silverberg's supposed abandonment of his serious literary work of the late sixties and seventies. For some critics, Silverberg's early sins are forgivable, but his backsliding into romantic fantasy is not. Disch, however, goes on to dismiss nearly everyone working in the genre (except Wolfe and Aldiss, whose masterpieces are chided for not becoming bestsellers) as producers of commercial entertainment. Apparently Disch has found this critical approach sufficiently rewarding to produce a book deriding the genre as mostly juvenile fantasy allied to the "flying saucer" mythology.

3. Silverberg speaks of himself casually as an "old pro" in a letter to the author (6 September 1988). Many of his more recent autobiographical comments stress his growth and commitment to professionalism as a writer and editor.

Any author must feel some conflicting feelings about his target audience. Silverberg's contrasting attitudes toward his audience are revealed in the interview with

Jeffrey Elliot, "Robert Silverberg: Next Stop, Lord Valentine's Castle," in his *Science Fiction Voices* #2 (San Bernardino, CA: Borgo, 1979), 51–62, where anger and self-reproach gradually give way to a more charitable tone; and his interview with Charles Platt, "Robert Silverberg," in his *Dream Makers* (New York: Berkley, 1980), 261–268, where he shows enthusiasm about returning to full time authorship in LVC.

4. Aldiss, Wolfe, and LeGuin are all mentioned favorably by Disch in "Big Ideas and Dead-End Thrills," 86–94, but Wolfe and Aldiss are damned with faint praise for having produced instances of "success d'estime." The considerable international reputation of these three has been helped by not beginning like Silverberg with a period of unabashed commercialism; and by factors outside of science fiction, such as LeGuin's feminism and Aldiss's contributions to mainstream realistic fiction and criticism.

5. Dick produced many novels too rapidly, as is well known. An energizing force in science fiction, Ellison has done battle with Hollywood and critics, but he has also made a few commercial compromises. Although Farmer began as an iconoclast, much of his work during his years as a full-time technical writer was devoted to establishing a reputation (as I indicate in my study, *The Magic Labyrinth of Philip José Farmer* [San Bernardino, CA: Borgo, 1984]). His literary motivations have often been tinged by the lure of commercialism. Pohl has been an able editor, novelist, and short story writer, but the demands of the market have also influenced his work. All these authors, nevertheless, have done some excellent work.

6. The best description of Silverberg's early career as an author and the later distinction he attained is still Thomas Claeson's RS (Mercer Island, WA: Starmont, 1983), to which I refer frequently. Claeson credits Silverberg with enormous knowledge of literary modernism. Silverberg's early life as a prodigy is well described in "The Making of a Science Fiction Writer," in WW, ed. Robert Silverberg (New York: Warner, 1987), 1–34.

7. Angry comments about audience reaction to his best fiction were voiced in Silverberg's interview in Elliot's *Science Fiction Voices* #2, 51–62. However, later comments in the interview in *Dream Makers*, 252, are more charitable about the audience and some remarks (263) suggest that Silverberg's literary vision needed to expand beyond the merely ironic spirit of DI (New York: Scribners, 1972; New York: Ballantine, 1973).

8. Silverberg, in an address to the Convention of the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts of Ft. Lauderdale in March 1989, complained bitterly that the sale of 13,000 hardcover copies of LOD (New York: Arbor, 1983) was evidence in the trade that the novel was a "failure." Switching to historical fiction produced marketing problems, since bookstores were uncertain whether to place LOD and GTK (New York: Arbor, 1984) in the historical fiction shelves or in the science fiction and fantasy sections.

9. The metaphor of the artist as juggler is implied in LVC. Silverberg uses it explicitly in "The Making of a Science Fiction Writer," WW, 10, commenting that "a writer, a professional writer, goes about his work more or less as a juggler does."

10. Silverberg's readiness to describe himself as an "old pro" (letter to author, 8 September 1988) may represent the mood of a period when he began to return strongly to science fiction tradition in his writing, as chapter 8 of this volume describes. By contrast, modernist rhetoric about literary art since the time of Baudelaire

tends to stress the artist's adversary relationship with the mass market and with middle-class values. This is so well known as to require no further documentation.

11. Killheffer's essay, "Striking a Balance: Robert Silverberg's *Lord of Darkness*, *Dying Inside*, and Others," appeared in NYROSF, 12 August 1989, 1, 12–14. While Killheffer's approach shows some insights, it suffers from a lack of perspective provided by a knowledge of Silverberg's overall career—as do many essays on one aspect or another of Silverberg's work.

12. Although I generally follow the divisions of Silverberg's career established by Clareson (RS), I have introduced the concepts of apprentice, journeyman, and master because they seem to clarify matters. I am indebted to Clareson and to Silverberg himself (letter to author, 8 September 1988) for details about his life. Silverberg's best known accounts of his early career are given in SBTC, in *Hell's Cartographers*, ed. Brian W. Aldiss and Harry Harrison (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975; reprint, London: Futura, 1976), and "The Making of a Science Fiction Writer," in WW, 1–34. A helpful collection of Silverberg's essays and comments over the years about his career and the genre is RR (Grass Valley, CA: Underwood Books, 1997).

13. The English "new wave" is best described by Brian Aldiss, with David Wingrove, TYS (New York: Atheneum, 1986; reprint, New York: Avon, 1988), 285–308. The period is still controversial, like much about the sixties.

14. The worldview of Campbellian science fiction is described by Aldiss in TYS, 207–229, and by Silverberg himself in the Afterword to a 1980 reprint of SP (Hicksville, NY: Gnome, 1957), 213–220.

15. For instance, see Silverberg's comments in the Elliot interview cited above in note 7, and his prefatory note to "Road to Nightfall" in TBORS (New York: Pocket, 1976), 1–2. Malzberg's essays in *The Engines of the Night* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982) constitute a strident attack on the majority audience of science fiction. Similar attitudes were voiced in Ellison's interview in Jeffrey Elliot's *Science Fiction Voices* #3 (San Bernardino, CA: Borgo, 1980), 9–18, which shows Ellison evolving from a genre author to a critic of modern culture.

16. Like Conrad, Silverberg has been concerned with the tragic nature of history. Many of the later works such as the 1987 novella "The Secret Sharer" and LOD have revealed an obvious Conradian influence. Russell Letson has suggested that the concerns of Conrad and W. B. Yeats have dominated much of Silverberg's fiction in RSMT, 36.

CHAPTER 2

1. For a detailed account of *Galaxy*, see John Clute and Peter Nicholls, eds., EOSF, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's, 1993; reprint, New York: St. Martin's, 1995, 462–464. For a brief account of Ferman's career at FASF see EOSF, 425–426. FASF was notable for its interest in literary values and traditions as well as for its hospitality to fantasy and science fiction that was not of the "hard science" variety.

2. The chief Ace editor was Donald A. Wollhelm, who had himself written some "space opera." During the fifties and early sixties, Ace reprinted much adventure science fiction and fantasy from the twenties, thirties, and forties, including Philip Nowland's original Buck Rogers novel, and novels by Austin Hall, Robert E. How-

ard, Ralph Milne Farley, Ray Cummings, Otis Adelbert Kline, Wallace West, Homer Eon Flint, Edmond Hamilton, and the early John W. Campbell.

3. Others have noted the fairy tale aspects of romantic science fiction, including Eric Rabkin, in *The Fantastic in Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, University Press, 1976), 54–59, where not only science fiction but also detective tales are likened to fairy tales.

4. Garrett was a likable, but erratic author and collaborator, as the comments by other authors make clear in *The Best of Randall Garrett*, edited by Robert Silverberg (New York: Time Scape, 1982).

CHAPTER 3

1. Majipoor has its share of exotic cities, notably in MC (New York: Arbor, 1982), not to mention a few reduced to archaeological digs. Silverberg's study of anthropological works was probably of immense help in creating the tribal cultures of Daw-inno in AWE (New York: Warner, 1988), and Sulidor in DTTE (New York: Doubleday, 1970).

2. Claeson gives the total output at seventy (RS 23), but he begins his count with 1960. Silverberg's first non-fiction work was *Treasures beneath the Sea* (?1960), but it was not until 1962 that his productivity in this area really picked up. There are a few other problems involved in providing a definitive figure: TGD (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967), and *The Search for El Dorado* (?1967) are essentially the same book.

3. Letson uses the phrase to describe the strengths of TOTS (New York: Ballantine, 1967) in the Introduction to the Gregg Press edition (Boston, MA: Gregg, 1977), pp. v–x. However, the term “the new Silverberg” had been used frequently by reviewers earlier to describe the stream of impressive works that appeared in 1969–74. Claeson picks the phrase up for his discussion of TOTS, but disagrees with Letson's assessment of the work as the beginning of the “new Silverberg” (RS 39), citing the work's loose structure as a defect.

4. I have taken the term “detribalized” from an essay on Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* by Harold R. Collins, “Kurtz, the Cannibals, and the Second-rate Helmsman,” describing the plight of the helmsman who is caught in limbo between his native culture and European civilization. Collins's essay originally appeared in *Western Humanities Review* (Autumn 1954): 299–310; but it is reprinted in *Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness*, ed. Leonard F. Dean (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1960). The theme of “detribalization” may be applied to Native Americans, and in fact, haunts the conclusion of Silverberg's *Home of the Red Man* (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1963). It would reappear in the story “Sundance.”

5. This myth was explored in Yeats's exercise in creative mythology, *A Vision* (1925), and its themes are implied by the imagery of some of his famous lyrics, such as “Leda and the Swan” and “The Second Coming.”

6. Perhaps it is confusing to use a genre term like “new wave” in connection with the “experimental fiction” or “metafiction experiments” of the late sixties and seventies, but both terms usefully describe an era of shifting attitudes and technical experiment in narrative. The presence of such writers as J. G. Ballard in the English “new wave” was bound to be influential. However, as Peter Nicholls notes in his

essay on the “new wave” in EOSF, 865–867, the term originally was borrowed from film criticism. More will be said about Silverberg’s experimental fiction in chapter 5.

CHAPTER 4

1. While there is no evidence that Silverberg has read either Barrett or Percy, he certainly would have been aware of their work. Barrett’s work received attention in New York circles, and Percy’s essays appeared in a number of periodicals and literary journals in the sixties. Percy’s first novel, *The Moviegoer* (1961), won the National Book Award and his second, *The Last Gentleman* (1966), satirized some of the social attitudes of the time. Percy even dabbled in science fictional extrapolation in *Love in the Ruins* (1971). However, more significantly, discussion of existentialism was fairly common in the New York of the 1960s.

2. Martin Buber’s theology, influenced by Hasidic mysticism, was part of the *Zeitgeist* in the sixties; it is most famously expressed in his *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith, 2nd ed. (New York: Scribners, 1958; reprint, New York: Macmillan, 1965), which expresses both a mysticism about experiencing nature and about encountering others as persons. However, several other works by Buber were translated and widely read in this time.

3. Paul Tillich’s attempt to make a synthesis of existentialism and a symbolic interpretation of Christian myth permeated popular discussions of religion in the late fifties and sixties. In his *Dynamics of Faith* (1957; reprint, New York: Harper, 1958), 1–29, Tillich develops his famous definition of religion as one’s “ultimate concern.”

4. Jung’s anima symbolism is fairly well known; it is expounded in *The Basic Writings of C. G. Jung*, ed. Violet de Laszlo (New York: Viking, 1971), 139–162, where in a selection from *Aion*, Jung provides a definition of anima symbolism. The anima is an ancient word for the soul, and is usually depicted as feminine; its negative counterpart, the “dark anima,” is associated with the temptresses and “femme fatales” of the literature of the Western world, and more especially with such characters in Romantic and Gothic poems and fiction.

5. W. B. Yeats uses the term “radical innocence” most memorably in “A Prayer for My Daughter,” describing a condition that the soul “recovers.”

6. “Transformational religions” appear to be heterodox attempts to turn secular experience into experiences illuminating the sacred, although Dudley’s essay is a little murky on this point.

7. David Thorburn in a fine study, *Conrad’s Romanticism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), also sees an affinity between Marlow and Kurtz (122). Such an interpretation has also been applied to Conrad’s “The Secret Sharer,” another work that has influenced Silverberg.

8. The journey to a mystical epiphany that results from affirming the world of nature or images, rather than purging oneself of phenomena, as in classical Christian mysticism, is also suggested by the essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson, especially “Nature” and the poetry of Walt Whitman, particularly “Song of Myself.” There is a considerable body of scholarship devoted to the mysticism in Emerson and Whitman.

9. It should be noted that encountering another person telepathically or through drug-induced perception takes Buber’s theology of personal encounter to an extreme not advocated by Buber.

10. The tradition of Romantic quest narrative has been a stronger influence on science fiction than historians of the genre generally acknowledge. It is invoked at the beginning of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and lies behind much of Verne's work. The motif is revived in Wells's Time Traveller's quest in *The Time Machine*. One of the better treatments of the links between science fiction and Romanticism from a genre historian is Darko Suvin's discussion of these connections in *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), 121–130, where the importance of Blake's and Shelley's apocalyptic poems for science fiction is assessed. For a discussion of the romantic quest tradition linking it to David Lindsay and his successors, the reader should consult Harold Bloom, *Yeats* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970; reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 88–96.

11. For the past half-century, Blake studies have emphasized the “apocalyptic humanism” of Blake's prophetic poems, especially the late prophetic works, where the apocalypse is brought on by the power of the human imagination.

12. As is well known, the mandala is Jung's symbol of unity, usually depicted as a quartet, which is also circular. As June Singer notes in *The Boundaries of the Soul: The Practice of Jung's Psychology* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972; reprint, Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1973), mandala is a Sanskrit word for circle, and “it means more especially a magic circle” (300). A useful discussion of this Jungian archetype is found in DOS, 199–203.

13. The term “death-in-life” is used to describe extreme age, and should be considered a contrast to the zombie-like “life-in-death” of the resurrected humans in BWTD. Both phrases are suggested by Bloom's discussion of Yeats's “Byzantium” in *Yeats* (391).

14. The novella is somewhat ambiguous about its concluding events, but Silverberg has confirmed in personal conversation (March 1989) that Oxenshuer is a sacrificial victim. Unlike some of the more celebrated figures in Greek tragedy, such as Oedipus, he seems unaware of his fate.

15. Oxenshuer's sacrifice is not only Dionysian but somewhat Christ-like, since he seems willing to die for the community that has accepted him. At the same time, the sacrifice allows him to expiate his guilt, and therefore his mood is perhaps more resigned than ecstatic, whereas a truly Dionysian figure might be intoxicated with a kind of rhapsodic surrender to a moment of self-transcendence. Incidentally, the author has assured me that Oxenshuer will indeed become the community's sacrificial scapegoat figure.

CHAPTER 5

1. The term “fabulators” was used, not very happily, by Robert Scholes in his study, *The Fabulators* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967). The approach was enlarged in later works.

“Post-modernism” has become a buzzword of nineties criticism, without always being used to bring light into obscure areas. However, it has been associated with fiction that is “self-reflexive,” calling attention to its own nature as a narrative construct; the word is also associated with fictive constructs that parody narrative conventions or constantly remind readers of alternative narrative possibilities. Post-modernism is also associated with other attempts to undermine conventional narrative

conventions or protocols, with a playful verbal texture, and with endings that reject the traditional forms of closure. It is often assumed that modernist fiction (1914–1970), permeated by irony, usually offered some form of closure. One attempt to define post-modernism is Linda Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988; New York: Routledge, 1995).

However, some limitations of the post-modern view of openness and closure are offered by Wayne C. Booth in *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 60–67. A view that contests the assumptions of much “post-modern” criticism is the idea that the nineties are the beginning of a New Romantic age.

2. Raman Seldes and Peter Widdowson in *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, 3rd ed. (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1993), provide one overview of the variety of literary theories, most of them influenced by European thinkers, that arose in this period. The model of Borges's stories, however, was a major influence on the “new fiction” of the sixties, especially on Barth, Gass, and Coover. Older models, such as Joyce's work, should not be discounted, however. Though influenced by Borges, Barth made a clear effort to recover eighteenth-century narrative modes for twentieth-century experiences in such books as *The Sot-Weed Factor* and *Giles Goat-Boy*, and some “post-modern” innovations may be found in *Tristram Shandy*.

3. Indeed, innovative techniques, particularly those involving parody, often imply a satirical vision. Coover's shorter fiction is permeated with satire, and it should not be forgotten that Barth (*The End of the Road* [1958]), Coover (*The Origin of the Brunists* [1965]), and Gass (*Omensetter's Luck* [1966]) all got started with novels containing a good deal of obvious social criticism.

4. Most of Silverberg's early fiction is concerned with the consciousness of a young white male somewhat like the author. The chief differentiating characteristic is generally the question of whether the protagonist is an untried youth trying to establish himself, or a veteran professional being tested once more. The chief exception had been the Nidor stories, as we have noted.

5. Both Dickson's and Silverberg's stories probably attribute more intelligence to dolphins than is warranted by reality. During the sixties, popular culture tended to conceive of the dolphin as nearly human. Such stories about sentient animals were not new in science fiction tradition. As Aldiss notes (TYS 2250), Clifford Simak had written stories about sentient dogs in the 1940s, and Eric Frank Russell had experimented with similar tales.

6. A close rapport or identity between humans and nature was a goal of much major Romantic poetry, as Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, 121–130, and others point out. Northrop Frye, an influential scholar of romanticism, has argued that humanity should strive to create a transformed world of “humanized nature” where humanity, nature, and art all become combined in one identity in *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957; reprint, New York: Atheneum, 1966), 141–146. Such ideas permeated the atmosphere in the sixties, when these stories were being conceived.

7. Here mention needs to be made of only a few science fiction writers who wrote “new wave” stories, such as Philip José Farmer, Gene Wolfe, Ursula LeGuin, and R. A. Lafferty.

8. Borges entitled one of his collections *Ficciones* (1962), although the meaning here is that of stories that possess the nature of fables or deliberately draw attention to their fictive nature. Another meaning of the term may be close to “exemplary novels,” a term used by Cervantes (Robert Scholes, *Fabulation and Metafiction* [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979], 130–133).

9. Coover’s “The Babysitter” with its multiple alternative narratives first appeared in his collection *Pricksongs and Descants* (New York: Dutton, 1969).

10. The stories of the “Instrumentality” by Cordwainer Smith (Paul Linebarger) present a number of characters who belong to sentient non-human species, which are apparently the result of mutation or genetic alteration of terrestrial animals. One of the best known examples of such characters is the feline Lady May in “The Game of Rat and Dragon” (1955).

CHAPTER 6

1. Jung’s efforts to define the role of anima figures may be found in *The Basic Writings of C. G. Jung*, 158–182, and Joseph Campbell, ed., *The Portable Jung* (New York: Viking, 1971), 139–162. Another discussion of the matter by a Jungian scholar is the one by M. L. Von Franz in *Man and His Symbols*, ed. C. G. Jung (London: Aldus, 1964), 177–188. Following Jungian theology, here and in *Dying Inside* Silverberg focuses on a close relationship between the protagonist and a sister, although the relationship collapses.

2. The trickster or rogue, known as a “picaro” in Spanish literature, is no doubt older than Odysseus, the archetypal trickster in Greek literature. Paul Radin’s classic study, *The Trickster* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), deals with variations on the type in Native American folklore, with the archetypal example being “Old Man Coyote.” Although a trickster character is clever about escaping from perilous situations, he often creates trouble for himself through his own cleverness, as happens to the protagonist of *Up the Line*.

3. Gordon’s essay appeared in *Extrapolation* 23 (Winter 1982): 345–361.

4. I am indebted to my former wife, Margaret Sullivan Chapman, for calling attention to similarities between *Metropolis* (1926) and TOG. Both works deal with the exploitation of labor, and in both the oppressed classes have turned to their version of religion for consolation. However, I am not suggesting that Silverberg was consciously writing an imitation of this classic film.

5. George Tuma’s essay is “Biblical Myth and Legend in the *Tower of Glass*. Man’s Search for Authenticity,” *Extrapolation* 15 (May 1974): 174–191. Philip Dick’s android novels were undoubtedly an influence on the novel.

6. In *Yeats*, 15, Bloom compares Victor Frankenstein, the scientist, to Shelley’s self-absorbed and solipsistic poet in *Alastor*.

7. Thomas P. Dunn and Richard D. Ehrlich, “The Mechanical Hive: Urbmon 116 as the Villain-Hero of Silverberg’s *The World Inside*,” *Extrapolation* 21 (Winter 1980): 338–360.

8. Silverberg himself suggested that his ironic fiction had reached its limits, and he worried that he might have alienated his audience (DM 263–264).

CHAPTER 7

1. Charles Platt, "Robert Silverberg," in *Dream Makers*, ed. Charles Platt (New York: Berkley, 1980), 263. Probably the commercial motives, though great, are over-emphasized by Silverberg. Silverberg throughout his career has in part commented as though he identified success with sales figures—a practice that gives support to critics who view him as a market-driven writer.

2. Actually, Silverberg had showed his disillusionment and weariness in "Sounding Brass, Tinkling Cymbal," 43–45, where he gives the impression of exhaustion, coupled with disenchantment with the audience and market. The same note was sounded in the interview with Elliot, in *Science Fiction Voices* #2, where Silverberg admits that he intended his temporary retirement from the fray to be permanent (52–53). No doubt the same sentiments were expressed elsewhere.

3. Even in the Elliot interview, Silverberg suggests that his annoyance with readers may have been "a premature kind of sulk" (52), because his more worthy books did begin to sell, after the audience caught up with him. *Dream Makers* (77–86) expresses this more conciliatory attitude, raising the possibility of whether Silverberg's complaints about the audience were not due in part to inactivity. By contrast, Barry Malzberg's interview in the same volume shows a more uncompromising attitude toward science fiction (80), although it is open to charges of arrogance.

4. In general, Silverberg's later view is that he had tried too hard to make sales, without contributing much originality to the genre (SBTC 23–26).

5. Kathryn Hume develops a theory of fantasy in *Fantasy and Mimesis* (London: Methuen, 1984) that explores fantasy according to its function. Although some readers would try to place the Majipoor works in the category of literature of escape (55–81), they should be viewed as sophisticated romances and placed in her category of the "literature of vision" (82–100).

6. On the Jungian shadow archetype, a good exposition is presented by Von Franz in *Man and His Symbols*, 168–176. To some degree the shadow figure here is similar to the frightening pursuer of Ged in Ursula LeGuin's highly acclaimed *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968).

7. The "Great Mother" archetype is highly important in Jungian thought, and corresponds to the fairy godmother or tutelary mother figure in fairy tales (and the sophisticated romances of the nineteenth-century fantasy writer, George MacDonald). A discussion of the Great Mother archetype may be found in *The Basic Writings of C. G. Jung*, 327–360.

8. Silverberg appears to have appropriated a name from Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* here: Numinor is an ancient name for Atlantis in Tolkien's mythology, although he preferred the spelling "Numenor." The kinship of "Numenor" to Otto's "numinous" is probably not accidental. Otto's classic *The Idea of the Holy* appeared in 1923; a good translation is John Harvey's translation of the second edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950; reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 1958). See pp. 12–13 for a discussion of the "sacred awe" or numinous experience.

9. Obviously, the political system of Majipoor is somewhat elitist and Burkean, depending on the authority of tradition. Most of the opposition to it has come from the dispossessed.

CHAPTER 8

1. At his public address, at the Conference of the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts at Ft. Lauderdale, in March 1989, Silverberg acknowledged publicly that LOD “reeked of Conrad,” although he had not been fully aware of the influence during its composition. Other Conradian parallels have been explored in discussions of DTTE (New York: Doubleday, 1970; reprint, New York: Ballantine, 1973) and the shorter fiction treated earlier in this chapter.

2. The film referred to is, of course, Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* (1979), which remains a subject of critical debate. *Heart of Darkness* has also received a more conventional film adaptation from the cable channel, Turner Network Television.

3. Silverberg uses the phrase in the Afterword to LOD (559), but it may create misunderstanding for those who have not read the novel. There are no instances of magic or the supernatural in the novel and Calandola is the only character who seems larger than life. For the most part, the narrative stays within the bounds of conventional realism.

4. Silverberg credits Battell’s narrative in the Afterword (559), calling it a “brief narrative” and describing its history, starting with its first appearance as published by Samuel Purchas (1625). Indeed it is a thin narrative that has been greatly enlarged by Silverberg. Silverberg’s invention of a neo-Elizabethan prose deserves more attention than space allows. It should be noted here that Elizabethan travel narratives, though colored by rhetoric and allusion, tended to be less mannered and Ciceronian than Elizabethan fictional works and much Elizabethan drama. For further information, see *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, edited by Margaret Drabble (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 799.

5. Romantic literature is replete with guilt-haunted wanderers and outcasts from the ancient mariner, Byron’s Cain, and Mary Shelley’s Victor Frankenstein, to the insane and criminal narrators in Poe and the traumatized Ishmael in Melville’s *Moby-Dick*. There is a large body of scholarship on this theme, which is too well known to require citation here.

6. N. K. Sandars, ed., *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin, 1960), places the epic’s events in the third millennium B.C. (14–15). The text itself is dated, somewhat speculatively, from the second millennium B.C. Although a “heroic age” of ancient Sumeria has been proposed, Sandars is skeptical about this hypothesis (20).

7. Dickinson’s famous statement opens the lyric given Number 435 in the definitive edition, edited by Thomas Johnson (New York, 1955), three volumes. On the tradition of Elizabethan and Romantic mad songs, see Bloom’s commentary in *Yeats*, 398–400.

8. James Gunn in *Isaac Asimov: The Foundations of Science Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 83–86, attributes much of the story’s appeal to its “alignment of forces”; scientists are in conflict with apostles of the irrational.

9. Gerald Jonas’s review in the *New York Times Book Review*, 24 July 1988, 25, was fairly typical of many favorable reviews that AWE received. Jonas, however, tempered his response, suggesting that Silverberg’s depiction of the environment of the future was inferior to Brian Aldiss’s work in *Helliconia Winter*.

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